

# THE WIRE

EVERY MONTH  
FURTHER INTO MUSIC

ISSUE 103 SEPTEMBER 1992  
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## THE SONG

## AND THE DANCE

What they were; what they're becoming; what James Brown did;  
and why we'll never see another Sinatra...



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## THE WIRE

- 4 **Now's The Time** All the unusual news/dates, plus Ray Carliss, Mercury Rev, Franz Abraham.
- 16 **Mike Westbrook** The bandleader in Sicily; Kenney Matheson goes Club Med.
- 20 **Television** The reformed guitar pioneers speak no evil to Jonathan Wright.
- 24 **The Song & The Dance** We jive off into our special issue
- 26 **"Brand New Bag"** David Toop grooves to the cut 'n' mix of James Brown and his successors
- 30 **Look what they've done to my song** Mark Sinker compares Frank Sinatra and Elvis Costello
- 36 **How Dance Changed** Allen Robertson boofs through its history
- 38 **Great Lost Recordings** Hopey Glass on Elvis Presley
- 40 **June Christy** Jack Cooke remembers a Tin Pan Alley rebel
- 44 **Larry Heard** The founder of House talks music and movement with Louise Gray
- 47 **The Wire T-Shirt** Write in! Dress Up! Wig Out!
- 48 **Mel Tormé** Kenney Matheson talks to the Voice of Ages.
- 52 **Franz Schubert** Brian Morton on radio-nights with the lieder-writer
- 54 **Books** Cool covers, reference works, more Schubert
- 56 **Invisible Jukebox** Philip Watson tests Ali Farka Touré
- 58 **Soundcheck** Another reviewers' dash through resounding plastic
- 75 **The Wire Index** Our back pages; yours at last
- 78 **The Classifieds** Wants upon a time
- 80 **The Write Place** Delight, debate, de end

Cover: who can tell the Singer from the Dance? Dancer from Rambert Dance Company, picture Catherine Ashmore; Sinatra, James Brown, pictures David Redfern.

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# NOW'S THE TIME *presents* THE NEWS SECTION

In association with

**PURDEY'S**

*chir vitar*

MORE RHYTHM LESS BLOOD



• **A PUBLIC** debate on the future of serious music takes place at *Outside In* this year sponsored by *The Wire* in association with *Outside In* and *Serious/Speakout Productions*. The Festival has been running in its various shapes and forms for 17 years. Over this period the nature of contemporary music has changed radically. Musical categories have been broken down and artists of different nationalities and disciplines have come together to create music. Yet practical conditions surrounding much new music have altered little in this time, and its marginal categorisation remains. By offering a platform for views from artists, managers, promoters, funding bodies, record companies, the media and the public alike, it is hoped that a dialogue will be started which begins to address the issues. The discussions will take place at the Hawth Centre, Cusley, from 10.30am - 1.30pm on the Sunday morning of *Outside In* (Sept. 6). Everybody welcome!

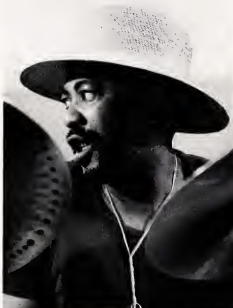
• **ALL NEWS** items should be sent to Adele Yaron to arrive no later than 1st October.

• **OUTSIDE IN** this year has a distinctive UK flavour. The popular jazz and contemporary music festival is concentrating on British acts this year with a diversity and range that would do any music festival proud. The weekend of the 5/6 September kicks off with The Dedication Orchestra: Louis Moholo, The Tippetts, Evan Parker, and Elton Dean - to name but a few - pay tribute to South Africans Chris McGregor, Dudu Pukwana and the Blue Notes on Saturday 5th. Also on Saturday, South Indian violinist Shankar plays with Nana Vasconcelos and Andy Sheppard, while Django Bates performs alongside Sylvian Richardson and Orphy Robinson. And on

• **BBC RADIO 1** is 25 years old this month. And to mark the occasion, Band of Joy Music are releasing a set of two CDs and two cassettes featuring 36 world famous artists including U2, Dire Straits, Jimi Hendrix, Joe Cocker, Eric Burdon and so on. Called the "1 and only" the album offers two hours of newly available studio recordings and will retail at around £20 after its release date on September 7th. Or, if you'd like to try for a free copy, Band Of Joy are running a competition with a limited number of freebies to give away. For further details contact Clive Selwood, Band of Joy Music Ltd, Sarabee House, Ridgway, Pyford, Woking, Surrey GU22 8PW.

• **"CONTRASTS"**, a series of three concerts devised by Heinz Holliger and Andras Schiff, provide a rare opportunity to hear an extraordinary range of music for various combinations of wind instruments and piano. The series includes the world premiere of a wind quintet by Sir Harrison Birtwistle, and the British premiere of two new works by Elliott Carter. A sequence of complementary works, including pieces by Bach, Beethoven, Mozart and Boulez, will also be performed. The concerts take place at the Queen Elizabeth Hall on 15, 16 and 19 September. Tickets available from the South Bank Centre are priced at £15-£5.

• **YOUNG BRITISH** soul star Vanessa Simon, whose bluesy style and rich tones have accompanied Omar on tour and on record appears in her own right at London's Jazz Cafe on Wednesday 30th September. One to catch if you haven't already done so.



Louis Moholo

CHRISTIAN HIM

Sunday, Venezuela is well represented with 29 of the country's leading musicians, singers, dancers and actors taking the stage from 12.30 - 10.30 p.m. Also on the final day, John Surman, Marilyn Crispell, Eddie Prevost and the Balanescu Quartet. See *In Town Tonight* for full details. And finally, be sure to visit *The Wire* stall, where the *Wire* staff will be happy to help you in your search for that missing back issue or that long sought-for T-Shirt.

## NOW'S THE TIME

• **FOUR MONTHLY** Sunday afternoon concerts at the London Lighthouse – the centre for people facing the challenge of HIV and AIDS – begins with the Brodsky Quartet on Sunday September 6th. This is the first in a regular classical music series set to support the centre, and also to welcome people to the visually striking building. All participants are giving their services free and all money raised will go directly to London Lighthouse. For further information and tickets contact Maggie Cole at The London Lighthouse, Lancaster Road, London W11.

• **"PUSHING AGAINST THE WIRE"** takes place at Northampton's Roadmender club, and aims to promote all disciplines whose work is radical, experimental, controversial, and confrontational. Running from 3-6 September, combining underground Techno with agit-rock theatre – a performance from Test Department – and experimental visuals plus a trade fair for small and larger labels, fanzines and videos, the event promises to be, well, radical. The Roadmender, 1 Lady's Lane, Northampton. Tel: 06014 604 222.

• **KEEPING FAITH** with the Nash Ensemble's policy of championing new music, this year's IBM sponsored 20th Century Music series presents nine works by living composers, including six premieres, to be performed alongside classics by Stravinsky, Britten, Ravel, Bartok and Shostakovich. The concerts run from 14th – 24th September in the Purcell Room at The South Bank Centre, tel: 071 8800.

• **ELECTRIC** entertainment at the TDK Round Midnight Jazz Festival comes courtesy of Bob Berg and Mike Stern, who set the ball rolling at the Queen's Hall, Edinburgh on Monday 31st August. Leading hard bopper Bob first played with guitarist Mike Stern alongside Miles Davis, before forming their own band with New Yorkers Lincoln Goines and Ben Petrowsky. Later that evening, the Queen's Hall hosts local boy Tommy Smith and his band, with pianist/composer Chick Lyall. Other attractions at this year's Festival include Carol Kidd, Nana Vasconcelos and Courtney Pine's Paradise Reggae Band. See In Town Tonight for details.



Bob Berg

GERT DE RUYTER

• **THE ANGLO-LATIN** American Fiesta takes place in Battersea Park on Saturday September 12th. This one day party, in aid of the underprivileged children of Latin America, promises a variety of music and dance acts

with a broad selection of national foods, drinks and attractions to enjoy. Admission by ticket only (Adults £7, Concs £6, Kids £3) available from 280 Battersea Park Road, London SW11. Please include an S.A.E.

• **RADIO 3'S** "Mixing It", the radio show which (just like *The Wire*) promotes genres of music unrepresented elsewhere, is going weekly. Taking its name from the wide variety of artists featured on the show (from Peter Gabriel to John Zorn) and presented in an informed but relaxing way, "Mixing It", according to its producer Sarah Devonald, makes the connections but ignores the hype. Brian Eno is the first guest of the new series, which begins on Monday September 14th (10.45pm). And longtime *Wire* writer Brian Morton presents a new fortnightly series "Impressions" which, as part of Radio 3's increased coverage of jazz, will alternate with the recorded jazz concerts. Brian's show, which begins on September 19th, will be mainly devoted to records: putting the recording in context, giving the listener a clear idea of what the musician is trying to do and how the music relates to other contemporary styles. The first show, broadcast at 11.30pm, will examine the role and importance of the clarinet in jazz.

• **TOMORROW'S** Warriors Today in association with Jazz Moves introduce, on bass, Gary Crosby with Robert Fordjou on drums and Trevor Watkins on piano – the regular trio with special guests backing big jazz names at the Watermans Arts Centre on Saturday 5th and 19th of September. Tickets 081 568 1176.

• **APOLOGIES** TO photographer Dominic Turner whose credit was unfortunately omitted from last month's 10th anniversary party picture spread. All that Mexican rum played havoc with the subbing.

## in TOWN TONIGHT

Our choice of September's jazz gigs

**BELFAST** *Crescent Arts Centre* (0232 242 338): Steve Noble Qx (18); *Old Museum Arts Centre* (0232 235 053): Marilyn Crispell/Eddie Prevost (8)

**BIRMINGHAM** *MAC* (021 440 4221): Marilyn Crispell/Eddie Prevost (8)

**BRENTWOOD** *Monkeys Jazz* (0277 218 897): Stan Tracey Qx with Art Themen (20)

**CRAWLEY** *The Hawth Centre* (0293 552 941): Outside In Festival: Saturday 5th - Django Bates, Bill Bruford's Earthworks, Shankar/Sheppard/Vasconcelos, Dedication Orchestra, Steven Noble Trio, Raphiphi, Evan Parker, Something Else with Larry Stubbins/QRZ, Dick Heckstall Smith, Orphy Robinson, Tina May, Sylvan Richardson. Sunday 6th - Mike Westbrook, John Surman, Crispell/Prevost, Balanescu Qx project with Keith & Julie Tippett & Steve Arguelles, Jazz Jamaica, Uno Sola Voce.

**EDINBURGH** *Queen's Hall* (031 668 2019): Debut! with Kevin Mackenzie/Julian Arguelles Group, Tommy Smith/Chuck Lysall (Aug 31); Bob Berg/Mike Stern Band (Aug 31, Sept 1); Carol Kidd (1, 2); George Shearing Duo (3); Nana Vasconcelos/Heartbeat (4); Courtney Pine & The Paradise Reggae Band (4).

**LEICESTER** *Phoenix Arts Centre* (0533 554 854): Steve Berry/Peter Fairclough/Nikki Iles (24)

**MANCHESTER** *Royal*

*Exchange Mobile:* Pyrotechnics (18-20) *Band On The Wall* (061 832 6625): Marilyn Crispell/Eddie Prevost Duo (10); Mose Allison Trio (17); Julian Joseph Qx (24). **OXFORD** *Cotswold Lodge Hotel* (01865 343 306): Bobby Wellins Qx (18)

## in & around LONDON

**BROADGATE ARENA EC2** (071 588 6565): Sax Appeal, Jason Rebello Qx, Clark Tracey Qx (8-10)

**JAZZ CAFE NW1** (071 284 4368): Dave Valentin (1-3); Gwen Guthrie (8); Elaine Delmar (9-10); Joe Hubbard (11); Tony Remy Funk Project (14); Bheki Mseleku (15); Joey Calderazzo (22-23); Kenny Wheeler (24); Noel McCalla (25); Vanessa Simon (29)

**JAZZ RUMOURS, N16** (081 254 6198): Dave Alexander Trio (4); Simon Picard/Paul Rutherford plus George Haslam/Liz Hodgson (11); Steve Miller/Lol Coxhill/Phil Miller plus Varian Weston (18);

**ONE HUNDRED CLUB** (071 636 0933): Jimmy Witherspoon (6)

**PIANISIMO CLUB** (071 482 4224): John Law Qx (14); Alex Maguire Qx (21); Ian Smith Qx (28)

**THE SOUTH BANK COMPLEX** (071 928 8800): Kronos Quartet (28) **WATERMANS ART CENTRE** (081 568 1176): Tomorrow's Warriors Today (5 & 19); Blow The Fuse (12).

News items and listings should reach us by the 1st September for inclusion in the October issue.

## AN EDITOR'S IDEA

WE UNDERSTAND how a certain amount of alarm might be inevitable. After all, if you went to view St Paul's, and found in its place a 900 ft statue of a green cartoon rabbit, bathed in flashing neon, you'd worry. Even if you were delighted, you'd worry. You'd worry how such a major operation could take place without you hearing about it.

It isn't this entirely understandable passing alarm that fascinates genuine critics - it's the rage and fear and sense of impending threat that bursts out, ever renewable, when the protocols of cultural hierarchy are ignored. When something features in an inappropriate context.

In other words, write about Marc Bolan and Ludwig van Beethoven in the same paragraph, and someone is going to be very angry. If you're writing in some perky teen-mag, a perky teen will complain, furiously. Set it down in a journal for older, wiser, more measured heads - and some older, wiser, more measured torrent of incoherent, babbling upset will flood in.


Some of what fascinates is the way the language itself - of utter betrayal, of uncomprehending outrage, of worlds turned upside down - is so similar, down the ages. Some of it's the sheer force of the passion. But mostly it's the notion of manifest threat: you're being talked to as if you'd menaced someone's baby. What is the threat? Who's being threatened? This isn't the Balkans. "It's only music," you want to say. (You don't, though, because nothing's more likely to make things worse - never take another's passion lightly.)

Music continues to matter to some, more than politics, more than poetry, more than anything: often without the remotest sense of self-awareness, of how bizarre this intensity might seem to outsiders.

The Mercury Music Prize will meet on September 8, to choose a winner ("irrespective of genre or sales performance") from its shortlist of ten albums: to choose between John Tavener, Jah Wobble, Bheki Mseleku, Barry Adamson, Young Disciples, U2, St Etienne, Primal Scream, Simply Red and The Jesus & Mary Chain. "The only criteria," says the press release ungrammatically, "is excellence." *The Wire* has its preferences, of course. We've featured and celebrated some of these names; will do the same for others; a couple we'd perhaps prefer to pretend we'd never heard.

For the moment, though, what we're looking forward to is the minor explosion of contempt and hurt and frustration when the winner's announced - denunciations of how the choice has been made, and how absurd and pitiful anyway to compare the peerless x with y, who everyone knows is crap.

It'll prove people still care; it'll prove they're still confused.



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## NOW'S THE TIME *present's*



MARK DOUET

### RAY CARLESS: Saxophone

It's a Friday night at the Intermezzo Club in Clapton, East London, and there's the kind of crowd crush that would make Michael Jackson proud. A large group of Ethiopians are desperate to see their main Ethiopian pop woman, Aster Aweke. Standing nonchalantly in the horn section Ray Carless, tenor sax in hand, is busy clocking the Arabic-sounding warbles of the other Ethiopian saxophonist Tekle, smiling in acknowledgement as the crowd hoot with delight at the man's phrasing. When it comes to Ray's turn they're equally enthusiastic as he complements Aweke's trembling vibrato voice with his sharp, cutting lines. "I wasn't going to show up that night because everything Tekle played the audience had that familiarity and they go 'yeah, we know that phrase,'" says the ever-generous Carless. "It was really nice, though. Mostly, people are very generous."

Playing with Aster is just one of the many musical lives of the 38-year-old sax player. He is a jazz musician, yes, but in the broadest possible sense. Playing with Aweke and Indian ghazal singer Najma are just two facets of his multiracial interest in music. Like many of his peers he's played with reggae bands – superstars Aswad and Maxi Priest among them – as well as jazz groups, notably a spell with Elvin Jones and current leading lights of the soul jazz scene Incognito, as well as being a founder member of the influential big band, the Jazz Warriors. It's a diversity that far from weakening his musicality has produced a rich and rhythmic debut album, *Body Moves*, on the small independent label Trio. An infectious melding of Caribbean-influenced rhythms, funk, reggae, R&B and of course jazz. "It's jazz in so much as it's improvisational," says Carless, "but you can't really pigeon-hole it. It's just music really."

He's a realistic, warm-humoured person and modest about his technical prowess on an instrument over-burdened with talented players. He has more than enough ability, however, to be able to grapple with alto, soprano and baritone, as well as tenor to a commanding degree. It's a surprise to find out that he didn't start playing until he was 18. "I just picked it up and I could play it. I thought, this doesn't need much practising, no problem. Then it dawned on me that I didn't actually know anything and there were a

few things I needed to study," he says with a sheepish grin. "I wasn't amongst musicians who were into studying formula, not seriously, so it wasn't until my early 20s that I thought I'd better get my head down and practise scales and stuff like that." Like any other saxophone player he spent his time studying Coltrane and Charlie Parker but Sonny Rollins was more his man. "I like Sonny because of the idea that he came from the Islands and had that Caribbean, calypso influence and he's got quite an individual way of doing things. There is no-one else that can mimic that. I've tried. I can't do it."

He may be self-deprecating about his saxophone skills but his views on the current British jazz scene are forthrightly clear. We chat about the Jazz Warriors and its influence on the jazz scene and young black musicians. Whilst it gave a community of eager young players a chance to flex their musical muscles, it wasn't just about "chops". Presentation of the music was of equal importance, he says – "looking smart instead of turning up to clubs looking like you've just come off a building site." It needed to discriminate positively, he says, as there was no other way for black players to get experience. It served them well – Courtney Pine in particular – and repercussions are still reverberating throughout the scene as other members like Steve Williamson, Orphy Robinson and the Mondesir Brothers make their mark.

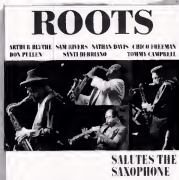
It means a handful of them can now command considerable fees. Carless doesn't count himself in that league but doesn't want to be a "slave to the telephone" either. Instead he's opened a "young peoples' fashion" shop to supplement his musical earnings. "I wanted to establish something else and be selective about the gigs I take at the same time." The art of earning money is all about creating the right atmosphere, he thinks. "The whole thing about it is that you're doing it for other people and in turn they're giving you money. I'm into making things as attractive as possible so that queues of people are lining up outside the clubs to hear you play. That's the way I'd like it to be. I haven't got there yet but that's the way I'd like it."

By Laura Connelly

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NOW'S  
THE TIME *presents*



## MERCURY REV: Rock and Beyond

DEBBIE SANDERSLEY

DAVID BAKER, vocalist, extends a hand in greeting. "The Wire — isn't that a jazz magazine? Some guys in the band are jazz enthusiasts. We're not jazz but we're kinda loose and improvise a lot."

Well, rock and improvisation can be a vital combination.

"Yeah man, but sometimes it really sucks."

Which is also true, but despite what they sometimes say, Mercury Rev certainly don't suck.

On the periphery of the current US guitar band "invasion", rather than somewhere in the middle of the crowd, no-one actually seems certain what to do with them, how to respond — this uncertainty is exactly where their strengths lie. Rock throws up something this innovative, this spontaneous perhaps once a decade — like all great bands they seem to make up their own logic as they go. The sound this self-styled bunch of "fuck-ups" make is a wild combination of acoustic guitar, lyrical flute, astonishing feedback barrages and

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## NOW'S THE TIME

image-rich lyrics that weave in and out of their open-ended pieces – some framing lovely sketches of melody, some acting as reference points to tangential exploration. Their highly praised 1991 debut album *Yerelf Is Steam* is beautifully unfathomable; their subsequent singles, "Car Wash Hair" and a cover of Sly Stone's "If You Want Me To Stay" offer no easy pigeon-holing.

Over here to take part in the Radio 1 American Music Festival, the Buffalo sex-piece – Baker, Dave Friedmann (b), Suzanne Thorpe (flute), Jonathan Dunahue (g,v) and Grasshopper (g) – got the gig in this tenuously conceived event simply because they're American (and were due to come over). Throughout late June, the Simon Bates radio show featured breathless, zappy announcements of the upcoming American attractions: Mercury Rev alone received no mention. Millions of daytime listeners are as unaware of the band as the band are of the festival. Their place in the queue for the daytime playlist is as far down as ever.

So, out of this chaos, how do they give birth to their music?

Jonathan: "It's like a soup."

Grasshopper: "Like a recipe."

David "Stone soup, right?"

Stone soup? They are actually eating as they propose this.

"Yeah, it's a childless story," David continues. "Two soldiers scammed the whole town because the townspeople had said 'We can't feed you, you're soldiers and you're taking everything up'. So the soldiers said 'Well look, all we need is a bucket and a stone and then we can make soup'. And later they said 'It's almost there, we just need a little fire', and then they said 'It's almost there, we just need a little water' and each time they trick them into making soup by everyone throwing some ingredient in. So we trick each other into making a song. We never say 'We've got a song'. We gotta trick each other and it's like someone will come along and say 'Yeah, it's almost there' – only they'll have no idea, only the empty pot. So then we gotta trick her (he indicates Suzanne) into throwing the potatoes in and him (Grasshopper) to throw the carrots in – so then you end up with a trick."

Dave: "Then you end up with a great stew. Then you sleep. Then you wake up and listen to the music."

So isn't that the way that all bands work?

David: No it's not. No it's not. Usually bands say 'Hey, I heard Van Halen today' and they go out and get a Big Mac and they say 'Look, it's ours now'. They didn't make their food. That's not cooking, that's just regurgitating. It's pretty tough to be on top of this and still be in a stupid rock band, but we know that the concept's there, we're still trying to work it out. A lot of jazz bands do that, they trick each other I guess. If they're good."

But do you try and disrupt each other once you've got a basic framework?

David: "Every single second of the day."

Is it a productive approach?

David: "If you're by yourself and listen to a song we did, you're still gonna be disrupted by it. It's constant disruption even if you weren't there – so I guess it's successful."

Is this something you try to do onstage?

David: "Don't think about it."

Dave: "It's not a 'trying' process."

Mercury Rev are keen to avoid citing specific musical influences

"Fighting", "breaking things", "food" and "sex" all get an airing, then they demand that I tell them who they sound like. How about Faust? Their organisation of sound surely has parallels with your approach

Suzanne: "Who?"

David: "Oh yeah, they get mentioned with Can, don't they?"

Everyone looks blank, and silence descends.

*Yerelf Is Steam* was recorded in 1990. What new ideas are they coming up with? Jonathan gets up and wanders out of the room.

David: "I guess he's going to go and find out..."

Grasshopper: "We're always working on new stuff, in the studio and playing and it's just a long pick and choose process."

Suzanne: "We've got to find new ways to trick each other 'cos we're all pretty hap to the tricks."

"The Left Handed Raygun Of Paul Shartsis" (the b-side of "If You Want Me To Stay") is a collage of tape loops, records and voice – certainly a departure from anything else the band had attempted before.


David: "Well that's what'll happen. We like to trick ourselves so we'll end up surprising ourselves. We've got no answers for you. No new direction, just a nude erection! But that's good, because you wouldn't want us to tell you because when you heard the record you wouldn't be surprised. So if we surprise ourselves you'll be surprised... have I said 'Food' yet?..."

So. No answers. No clues, little light shed on the subject. Maybe this is the way it should be. What's the point of theorising, dissecting and coming up with your treatise on musical construction when intuition serves you this well? Put a question to their music and you only end up with another question mark. They have to be heard to be understood.

Dave's repeated request that I play drums with them on their last number is mercifully overruled by the other band members on behalf of their absent drummer, and we make our respective ways to the audience and the stage. Proceedings began with "The Blue And The Black", but on this occasion the haunting piano motif was substituted by a physical assault on the instrument with what looked like scaffolding poles. Some songs were similarly demolished, others truncated, still others elongated – they work with an empathy that belies their offstage shoulder-shrugging nonchalance. David Baker wanders around the edge of this sonic assault, but no lying down this time and no nude erection. After a good half hour of guitar neck-wringing, Grasshopper traded it for clarinet and engaged Suzanne in a garbled exchange on the lengthy "Very Sleepy Rivers" before throwing it into the crowd and ambling off. No encore, just a very un-rock'n'roll end to a tremendous – and tremendously loud – performance.

On a very hot June night before the interview, whilst enjoying only fufal sleep, I dreamt that I was on my own listening to Mercury Rev's music – as the waves of sound built up to an unbearable intensity, I crashed my head through the ceiling into the room above to get some relief. Their process of disruption obviously extends offstage into the sleeping state of bystanders – and that perhaps says more in its incoherent way than any dispassionate musical analysis ever could.

By Dave Morrison



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# NOW'S THE TIME *presents* FRANZ ABRAHAM: Festival Organiser

FRANZ ABRAHAM is a wizened, grey-haired, be-wrinkled mass of nervous tics. At least, he will be by now. When I interviewed him a couple of months ago he radiated the clear-eyed, fresh-faced enthusiasm which befits his 28 years and his success in assembling Art Projekt '92.

If initiating and organising a festival of this nature is horrendously difficult, the problems of its day-to-day maintenance would make a Maharishi marly, but when we spoke Abraham was just at the stage where the philosophical becomes the blasé: "I just heard this morning from Iggy Pop that he can't make it. We'll try to get Bob Dylan instead."

Iggy was down to participate in John Zorn's celebration of Radical New Jewish Culture, featuring Speedy Zomglasses himself with Elliott Sharp, the Soldier String Quartet, Tim Berne, Richard Teitelbaum, the New Klezmer Trio, John Lurie, Marc Rebort, Zorn's *Krattnacht* and a showing of the classic silent film *Der Golem* with live accompaniment from Gary Lukas and Walter Horn.

This gives you an inkling about the tenor of the festival. One of the most exciting ideas Abrahams came up with was to allow various

musicians to be artistic directors for whole days, programming what and who they wanted. It was

tough getting anyone to agree to take part to begin with – everyone wanted to know who else was booked – but eventually Gidon Kremer,

Philip Glass, Paul Hillier,  
Zorn, Arto

Lindsay, Ornette Coleman and John Cale were booked as directors for the day. Or two, in the case of Zorn and Kremer.

The point of Art Projekt '92 is that there is no point in the passport controls between one genre and another. Abraham is not interested in forced fusions. What attracts him is the chance to illuminate the genuine connections, the threads common to different sound cultures. Some links were obvious – Zorn has recorded an album of Ornette Coleman's music – but other cross-references were fortuitous. Abraham planned the outline of the Festival, selecting the directors, but the choices those directors subsequently made would often create unexpected correspondences: Gidon Kremer had programmed some Glass chamber pieces for Days 1 & 2, but it was only later that Abraham heard about Glass's transcription of Bowie and Eno's *Low* and arranged for it to be performed on Day 3. That day also includes showings of the Glass-Godfrey Reggio collaborations, *Koyaanisqatsi* and *Powaqqatsi*, and Peter Greenaway's film about Glass.

ART Concerts – its nearest analogy in Britain would be Serious! Speakout – has been promoting about 50 concerts and 10 tours a year but along with Munich's Cultural Department were not content with the local scene. They wanted to establish an event which would add to the city's artistic standing internationally. Abraham came up with the ideas which set the festival apart, the director-for-a-day scheme and the thoroughness of the admixture of jazz, rock and contemporary classical artists.

Getting anyone to commit themselves to the concept was, he says "more than difficult. It was a year before anyone said yes. John Zorn was the first, but obviously this kaleidoscope concept is very close to his own work. Gidon Kremer was one of the first but he is perhaps the most famous and best violinist in the world and he was very occupied. Arto Lindsay was one of the first also. Ornette Coleman was enthusiastic right from the start but took a long time to actually propose a programme. Similarly with John Cale. They had to think what to do and also to take the risk of getting reviewed as programmers, as festival makers, instead of as performers. Also we had only really professional promoters since 1989 so did not have the standing of, say, George Wein. Also, the sponsor situation was not clear for a long time." Unlike a more established agency ART concerts had to do an enormous amount of basic leg-work making contacts from scratch with artists, their agents and potential sponsors. The artists asked who were the sponsors and the sponsors asked who were the artists. In the end Abraham has had to take most of the financial risk himself, and it's a considerable risk. Munich's potential domestic audience is several million less than London's and an audience of 300 is about what he might expect from an average concert.

It's a fascinating prospect, not least because, as with Derek Bailey's Company Week, there is the possibility that, as the festival goes on, musicians may get together to perform unscheduled music in unexpected combinations. Abraham has got promises from some massively mega-names for 1993 and 1994. The size of the 1992 audience will determine whether there will be festivals for them to fulfil these promises at, so, if you possibly can, get your bum on one of those seats now. The festival runs from 28th August to 6th September.

By Barry Witherden





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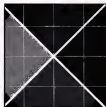
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# ON MIKE'S BIRTHDAY

**Actually it wasn't his birthday. But it was a huge party down in Sicily to celebrate the work of Mike Westbrook – and Kenny Mathieson flew down with him. In the first part of our two-part feature Britain's most innovative Big Band leader discusses structure, collaborating with Kate, and the notorious Smith's Hotel chord.**

IT IS meltingly hot and sticky in the elevated open-air courtyard of the Terrazza CSIL in the heart of old Catania. Even at 10pm, the heat generated by the baking Sicilian sun hangs heavy in the air, punctuated by the whine of one of the scooters which are endemic to the city.

Heat is being generated at an equally searing level from the stage, however, where twenty musicians are pouring their hearts and their lungs into Mike Westbrook's powerful and widely varied music. They do so for three long, unforgettable nights, opening with his delightful and imaginative *Big Band Rossini*, and moving on to a jam-packed survey of his writing, from *Cittadell'Room 315* (1975), *The Cortège* (1979) and *The Westbrook Blake* (1980) through to world premiere live performances of two new pieces.

It is perhaps ironic that we have to travel to Sicily to hear this incredible tribute to a great British jazz composer, but it would be unfair to castigate British promoters for not putting him on in similar fashion. Westbrook is of course a European figure anyway, but the rationale for the Festival organised by the remarkable Associazione Catania Jazz goes far beyond any simple "things are so much better in Italy" reasoning. This is a literal labour of love on the part of Pompeo Benincasa and Marcello Leanza, and to prove the point, admission to the gigs is free!

This being Sicily, it was not an entirely smooth ride – the venue had to be changed at the last minute, and an unexpected thunderstorm on Saturday afternoon threatened the crucial gig that night, which featured both the new works. In the end, though, it was a triumph for Catania Jazz and for Mike Westbrook and his musicians, and he's rightly forgiven for

trying to cram too much into each programme, an understandable compulsion in the circumstances. For Mike, of course, it still wasn't quite enough time . . .

THE NIGHT before the Festival is Alan Barnes' birthday, and a large chunk of the band repair to a local bar to celebrate, a final unwinding before the serious work starts. There, Mike talks, still with a slight edge of incredulity in his voice, about the miracle of such a Festival being offered to him, in a city he has played – with the brass band six years ago – only once in his life. Kate quietly divulges that he has been close to tears on occasion thinking about it, and has been rising daily at 4.30am for weeks, and working through until 8 or 9pm preparing the music.

"That first visit went down terribly well," Mike recalled. "We even managed to include a Sicilian song from *The Ais*, and they eventually had to get the police to gently intervene to bring the concert to a conclusion. Most importantly, though, we made friends with Pompeo and Marcello, and they suggested that we do a three-day festival last year, and asked me what I wanted to do, and as usual when asked that question, I said I would like to work with the orchestra. They were a little crestfallen, since it was about three times the budget they had, but they worked away at it, and phoned a few months ago and said okay, we have the money, what do you want to do? They are marvellous people – they do it all very much for the music.

"We had the *Rossini* pretty well-tailored by the beginning of this year, including the two new additions, but I think I can



Mike, Phil Minou, Kate

GUY LE QUERREC/MAGNUM

honestly say that I re-worked everything else, with the one exception of the material from *Citadell/Room 315*. On things like *On Duke's Birthday* or *The Cortège*, it was a matter of expanding the orchestration, with an odd change here and there, while others, like the version of "I See Thy Form" with the high trumpet counterpoint, had never been played live before. I re-worked it all very carefully, but a lot of my interest was focussed on the two new pieces."

That much was obvious from the extra degree of tension around the lunch table on Saturday, when Mike was clearly a little anxious both about the new music itself, and about the on-stage monitor mixes which, unlike Debbie Dickenson's excellent auditorium sound, were a little problematic. The whole thing will stand or fall, he tells drummer Peter Fairclough, on whether the rhythm section can hear each other. The musicians, too, feel that this middle concert is the toughest of the three, although, as one of the younger members pointed out, none of it is exactly easy.

In the event, monitor mixes are still less than ideal, but it doesn't seem to matter. The band takes up where they left off with *Rossini* on Friday, and sail through Mike's complex charts with scarcely a hiccup. The Westbrooks have a way of inspiring great loyalty in musicians (and in the back-up team which supports their activities), and the mix of old Westbrook hands, like Chris Biscoe, Pete Whyman, Alan Wakeman, Paul Nieman and Peter Fairclough, with younger recruits and several deops (all of whom acquit themselves superbly) proves a winning one.

The new works are *I.D.M.A.T.* (based on Ellington's "It Don't Mean A Thing" and prepared for John Harle's *The*

*Shadow of the Duke*, but not used on the final album) and *Measure for Measure* (a work commissioned by the Vienna Art Orchestra, but which proved to be too long for their programme). Length is a factor which Westbrook says he never takes into account, other than in film music, but works instead on the basis that "the programme always has to adapt to fit the piece". Both works revealed his current preoccupation with structure through rhythmic patterns, which began with *London Bridge Is Falling Down* (1987).

"With *I.D.M.A.T.* I had the problem of creating a piece which didn't just copy the Ellington version, but I discovered that it learnt itself to some of my recent methods by superimposing the theme over a different five-bar structure rather than four, and in that way I was able to extend the tune through a series of rhythmic patterns, which is why I changed the title to suggest a new version. The fact that it was not on the album was extremely disappointing for me, not least because John played superbly, but it did get me started on writing new material for the *Rossini*, which allowed me to put some of my more progressive recent ideas, which I explored in *London Bridge*, back into a big band context.

"*Measure for Measure* was a last-minute commission from the VAO, who I feel parallel our work in many ways, although unfortunately we don't have the subsidy to tour all over the place! It is a kind of off-shoot of the sax concerto I did with John Harle last year (*Bean Rows and Blues Shots*), which was another experiment with superimposing time-scales against each other. I think of it as a way of setting up interesting long structures, rather than having twelve bars which keep coming around, and there were some ideas arising from that which I

## WESTBROOK

had not developed as much as I would like to."

The composition was a highly intense and dramatically charged affair, rising to a declaratory central climax across its three-part structure, with the alto saxophones of Alan Barnes and Chris Biscoe set in counterpoint with Kate's voice. It made unconventional (but typically Westbrookian) use of innovative internal voicings, instrumental groupings, and tonal colours, and represented a logical extension of his interest in accommodating jazz idioms, including free jazz, within a structured but formally adventurous framework.

HIS CURRENT work with rhythmic patterns follows a long period in the 1980s where that structural development was essentially harmonic, dating from the discovery of the infamous Smith's Hotel chord in Glasgow in 1982, which became the foundation of *After Smith's Hotel* (1983) and *On Duke's Birthday* (1984), and carried on into *London Bridge*, as well as the material for the trio with Kate and Chris Biscoe, and their theatrical works.

"I hit upon the chord during a sound check at the old Third Eye Centre in Glasgow, and its ramifications became the starting point of a new harmonic development, and also a new attitude to musical structure, a new way of building music. The Smith's Hotel chord is basically a way of superimposing one pattern on another, a conventional chord with a kind of free counterpoint which gives intervals and clusters and so on which aren't quite the same as you would get from developing an ordinary chord. It has been a rich source of ideas for me, and I have applied it in many different contexts, alongside conventional chords.

"The idea of harmonically-free music goes back to Ellington, who was always pushing music to the limits of tonality and often beyond, especially in the internal workings of the music. I think I always write tonal music, but within that I want to be able to use notes in a more arbitrary fashion. Improvisers like Eric Dolphy found ways of playing all kinds of interesting notes over conventional structures, and I wanted to address the point where conventional tonality breaks down into freedom – in crude terms the ability to play any note you want at any time. You can either jump in with both feet in a purely improvisatory way, which sometimes produces interesting results and sometimes doesn't, or you can try to find a kind of technique, a way of writing, to approach it.

"I don't do those kind of arrangements where lots of people blow on the same sequence, and I suspect that is maybe more interesting for the soloist as well. I think structure is the thing we lost, and the intuitive became over-valued against the intellectual in the music. If you listen to Charlie Parker and classic early bebop, you can hear that concern with structure which disappeared later in bop, and again in the other direction with the freedoms of the 1960s, which I went through with enormous enthusiasm, but now I have maybe heard enough of that, and no longer find it satisfying.

"In fact, I have found it tremendously exciting to work on compositions which have no improvising at all, as in the two-piano music with John Alley on Kate's new record

(*Goodbye Peter Lorre*), which is something I never thought I would do, but has proved fascinating. Song-forms open up another dimension again in structural terms, as in the Brecht-Weill songs, or the songs in *London Bridge*, and I greatly regret its lack of performances."

*London Bridge Is Falling Down*, scored for a ten-piece band and chamber orchestra, would seem a natural for The Proms, where Westbrook will become the first jazz composer to be featured in a main evening Prom on 30 August, when they perform the *Big Band Rhapsody* at the Albert Hall. The Orchestra will be back in action at the Outside In Festival in Crawley on 6 September, when they will perform a selection of his works, including *Measure for Measure*, in what has been an active summer.

The Westbrooks, meanwhile, are embarked on their next writing project, an opera for Channel 4 entitled *Good Friday 1663*, which will be recorded next year for transmission in 1994. Their working relationship is now long-standing, dating back to the mid-1970s, and is something of a symbiotic one, going beyond any straightforward he-does-music, she-does-words demarcation.

"We work most of the time, and are together most of the time, and a lot of my scores are done in the studio where Kate paints. She will often suggest specific things concerning the music, especially where it effects the vocal parts, but our working relationship is more complex than that. It has been an amazing adventure, from the early days of the Brass Band to where we are now. There are always problems if you try to earn a living exclusively from creative work, but it does mean that we have been able to make a kind of creative lifestyle devoted to art in its various forms."

BACK IN Catania, that creative lifestyle is paying massive dividends. The final night, entitled The Westbrook Song Book, but not devoted solely to songs, or indeed to Mike's compositions, since it includes several of his distinctive arrangements, is an incandescent triumph. The slight tension of Saturday has gone, and everyone is ready to go for it, aided by singer Phil Minton, violinist Dominique Pifarely, and trombonist Danilo Terenzi.

The rich sonority and sheer power of the big orchestra is over-whelming, and familiar pieces are transformed in a glorious welter of expanded sound, none more effectively than Blake's "I See Thy Form", which ends the first set in a blaze of emotion.

It is a fitting climax to a marvellous celebration of Westbrook's music, and his broad smile says it all. On stage, when he is not playing piano, he becomes contagiously wrapped up in the music, swaying along in a curiously shambling fashion to a tempo which never quite seems to be the one being played, greedily absorbing every note and nuance of his music. That has been a too-occasional satisfaction over the years, and one which he richly deserves. ■

*The Westbrook Orchestra play The Proms on August 30 (8.15) – a breakthrough for British Jazz! – and the Outside In festival September 6 (3.00)*



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# TURN ON, TUNE IN, DROP OUT

In pre-MTV 1977, Television were the strange new drug of guitar elation. Now Tom Verlaine's epochal NYC group have returned — after only 14 years — with that difficult third album.

Jonathan Wright plugs into the TV mindset.

"DON'T ASK why we re-formed."

The figure on the sofa is almost eerily familiar, still skeletally thin, still with the half quizzical, half accusatory stare that burned out of the cover of *Marquee Moon*. Time, since 1977, has been kind to Tom Verlaine.

It's been as kind to the legacy of Television — guitarist, vocalist and songwriter Verlaine; drummer Billy Ficca, his wild curly hair now flecked with grey; monosyllabic bassist Fred Smith with his lazy, mysterious smile; and guitarist Richard Lloyd, the uneasy result of a sartorial squabble between a lumberjack and a preppy.

Officially, we're sitting in an EMI office to discuss Television's third album *Television*, released 14 years after its predecessor, the underrated *Adventure*. But, as Verlaine's opening gambit suggests, the past is colliding so violently with the present today that the rules of this conversation are of necessity shaky, to be made up as we go along.

WHICH IS perhaps appropriate. Television's roots, after all, lie in the ferment of what developed into the mid-70s New York punk scene, a time when it was essential to challenge the rules, to find new ways to play, even new places.

"In New York at the time, there was no place to play," explains Richard Lloyd. "You had to rent your own theatre and set up your own sound and lights and it was a big drag. So, when Tom was trying to find a place and saw this CBGBs, we didn't know what it meant. When Hilly allowed us to play there, other bands heard about it. Because you literally couldn't play anywhere without a record contract. People would go there in droves and beg for a chance to play. Hilly always gave it to everybody.

"Everybody got to play there at least once, so it was a place where you could play every week, or whatever. It was just a convergence point, you know? All the bands were very dissimilar and people would go there because they didn't care who was playing. I mean, we had a distinct audience but



Smith, Verlaine, Lloyd, Ficca

people would spend all night there 'cause there'd be two bands a night and they'd play two sets each and you were always getting something interesting."

"It was," says Billy Ficca, "geological — I mean *geographical* location that was primarily responsible and for a time, chronological similarity too."

"It was a harmonic convergence," says Lloyd.

"It happens a lot in the history of the art world," says Ficca, "some scene where people congregate, that somehow has a focus."

But, as Lloyd has hinted, the problem of such a focus lies in the artificial uniting of disparate artists, the imposing of a simple thesis on a multiple event. CBGBs drew journalists from both sides of the Atlantic, anxious to see what was happening, and to give it a name.

Actually, a lot of things were happening, some already in motion for some time. The New York of the mid to late 60s was not a rock 'n' roll city at all (those rock bands present, notably The Velvet Underground and Vanilla Fudge, were bizarre exceptions in and outside NYC, and regarded with suspicion by the rest of the rock world). If there was a New York zeitgeist, it was torn between the pop art loftworld of Warhol and cohorts, and the free jazz experiments of Coltrane and Coleman: if there was a common aim, it was stretching conceptual limits, exploding categories, pushing to places only hinted at before.

The creative ferment of these scenes had burned itself out, or been co-opted. By the early 70s, rock 'n' roll bands



gradually came in from many different angles to fill the void. Musicians as varied as The New York Dolls, The Parti Smith Group, David Byrne's Talking Heads, The Ramones, Richard Hell (a founder member of Television) and his Voidoids, Suicide and Blondie had little to unite them beyond their desire to rewrite the language of rock 'n' roll. But, they were all recognisably New York rock 'n' roll bands, anarchic and chaotic in spirit, drawing on the force of these questing New York avant gardes. What would become known as punk, a "simple" thing, was in fact a flux of colliding musics, reflecting and feeding on further flux.

**TELEVISION'S PART** in this was laid out on their seminal 1977 debut *Marquee Moon*. Smith's bass is the anchor, holding everything together. Picca picks up the gauntlet laid down by The Velvet Underground's Moe Tucker and throws the spirit of Tucker's naive energy against his own fluid rolls and fills. Over this, Lloyd and Verlaine's twin guitars call and respond, pulling melodic ideas over long instrumental passages, each daring the other to go just that bit further.

In the midst of all this, there's Verlaine's voice, perhaps the most underrated element in Television's music. In the fuss over his guitar playing, the point that Verlaine is a songwriter is often lost - what's more, the lyrical richness of such songs as "Marquee Moon" and "Venus De Milo" needs the voice of Verlaine for its true expression. But covers of Television songs are also always awful because the tension between Verlaine the songwriter and the band's free jazz influence has been lost. As

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## TELEVISION

"punk" solidified into that single thing, the style against which all music was to be judged, this bounded improvisation – and its roots – out of the discourse. To the extent, in fact, that discussion of these areas now draw even Verlaine and Lloyd into a conversation where each can surprise the other – just as they do in performance and on record.

"For me, I was playing saxophone in the early 60s, you see, so I fell into these people like Ayler and Coleman and Coltrane," says Verlaine. "This was like trying to sneak into bars, being an underage kid trying to sneak into these bars in Philadelphia to see Roland Kirk. Before he was Raheem!"

"Sun Ra I went to see a number of times with his orchestra," says Lloyd. "That would be wonderful because it was like jazz trance – 45 minutes on the same number with 45 people playing, 30 people playing the same thing and 15 of them playing solos at the same time. At the end of it, you were just really taken to another space. It was really nice, but myself I was always following the electric guitar, blues and psychedelia."

"I *hated* electric guitar. I thought it was the most twee piece of shit you ever heard. De-nah, de-nah, nah nah nah, nunk [or *shervashan*]. What's that?"

"That's 'Train Kept A Rollin'.' I hate that shit."

"No, but that for me was an onslaught."

"So you like it?"

"Yeah, that was the first time I liked electric guitar."

"Oh, you *liked* it. I liked more Hendrix and the Grateful Dead's first record." Lloyd shakes his head slightly.

"That was five years later actually."

"Oh, you mean Yardbirds."

"Yeah, Yardbirds. I think 1965. And 'All Day And All Of The Night' – that again was an onslaught."

Echoes of this "onslaught" – the "Brit Invasion" – found expression in the wave of American garage bands of the 60s (collected by Lenny Kaye on the *Nuggets* albums). Television used songs by these bands in rehearsal.

"What we would do is middle 60s stuff," says Lloyd, "Seeds or Chocolate Watch Band ('Psychotic Reaction,' pipes up Ficca to general approval). Count Five. There were this zillion bands that all had like one hit wonders that would get into the top forty and none of their other material would get in. Los Bravos – 'Black Is Black' – you know, some really wonderful one-hit wonders – 'Dirty Water'. The Troggs had a few. If you took all of those bands' records that actually went somewhere and actually made one band out of it, maybe we were influenced by that."

It's worth pausing to recall Greil Marcus' comment on garage rock and its relationship to punk – "destroying one tradition, punk created another one." Rock in the mid-70s reinvented a heritage for itself not from the successful or important groups of the day, but from a mess of already forgotten one-hit wonders who came out of nowhere and plunged straight back. Today it's almost compulsory for rock

'n' roll bands to cite this music – but it wasn't always so.

In such a context, what space can a reformed Television occupy, in a landscape of popular music they helped to map out? They admit to being uncertain how the new album will be received, with Lloyd quietly laughing to himself at the thought that a generational gap of impossibly subtle distinctions might see an elder brother buying *Television* whilst his kid brother goes for Nirvana.

But of course the DIY ethos let loose by punk has extended much further than rock – the kid in the garage is as likely to be utilising cheap technology to make dance records as learning the electric guitar (or perhaps s/he'll be listening to Primal Scream or The Shamen and trying to do both). The pitfall in this mixology comes when a music loses its direction in the mix-up, failing to communicate its reasons for being, to connect with old or new audience. It's a pitfall Television recognises: "There's fusion, the combination of jazz and rock, but they get all homogenised together," says Billy Ficca. "It comes out neither jazz nor rock. So, our concept is fission, where you don't mix them up, you don't homogenise them. They stay raw individually, so when it's improv, it's pure jazz and when it's rock, it's pure rock."

Listening to the latest album in this light, it's possible to see Television's new recordings as far closer in spirit to the reconstituted Wir(e) than to the "comeback" of The Buzzcocks. It's not that Television have radically altered their sound or attempted to utilize technology in the way Wir do. Indeed, this is "traditional" guitar music with more than one nod back to the past. "Willie", for instance, makes reference to Verlaine's own catalogue, recalling "Postcard To Waterloo" from his solo album *Words From The Front*, a song which in turn self-consciously celebrated The Kinks. Yet the sense of adventure is still present, the sense of musicians both challenging each other and moving towards a common goal.

The past and the present collide again.

So, why did they re-form? Why did they form? With free jazz and garage rock in such combustible proximity how could Television not form? Lou Reed once commented that getting the change from one major chord to another "right" was something that continued to give him immense pleasure. The triumph of Television's "fission" was to get this change "right" from a new angle, showing it was possible for songwriting values and improvisation to coexist. In doing so, they posed questions about the possibilities of the two guitars, bass, drums, voice line-up which has yet to be answered by a rock community which even today barely recognises the question. Like Hendrix before them, this has resulted in Television being simultaneously marginalised and deified, assumed to exist in a space purely of their own making. Nothing could be further from the truth.

With so few even asking the right questions, perhaps it's logical Television should choose to pick up where they left off. 14 years ain't nothing when there's work to be done. ■

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# THE SONG

The theme issues over the last few months have been intended to discuss and explore music in ways that cut across tradition genre (and marketing) boundaries. So this month we take a look or several at modes of expression that certainly predate the current state of things, and perhaps go back to the dawn of music — whatever that might have been. **THE SONG** and the **DANCE**: we may not know why and how they started, but we do have some idea of their presence and changing impact in modern music. From Stravinsky to James Brown, from Schubert to Sinatra to Elvis Costello, the shaping demands **DANCE** and **SONG** make, some obvious, some not, are still shifting, still realigning. Some of them, we hope, have been pinned down in the pages that follow.

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# THE DANCE





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**David Toop looks/locks into a brand new time lapse . . .**

*... whoever doesn't like what I did, 20 years from now they can go back and redo it."*

Teo Macero, discussing his method of recording Miles Davis in Ian Carr's biography *Miles Davis*.

IN FEBRUARY 1965, James Brown and his band interrupted their lengthy bus journey to a show by stopping off at a studio in North Carolina, for barely an hour, to record "Papa's Got A Brand New Bag". The song dragged for nearly seven minutes as the musicians, including guitarist Jimmy Nolen, struggled with fatigue.

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but at the same time groping towards the disco cyborg future. Whatever was latent in the weary grooves, somebody heard it, for as Cliff White and Harry Weinger wrote in their notes for the James Brown *Star Time* CD box of 1991: "In a brilliant post-production decision, the intro was spliced off and the entire performance was sped up for release."

Razor-blading a huge pop hit, this taut amalgam of street slang, loping beats and nervous punchy accents, the first moment of modern soul, out of something that started as a flatfoot grind; this was momentous. Brown's quoted reaction reflected his glimpse into a future, our present, in which songs are titles, source points, initializations, indicating the beginning and the reference point for a process of continual transformation. "It's a little beyond me now," he confessed. "I'm actually fightin' the future. It's - it's - it's just out there."

The peculiar aspect of the story is that most of us have only become aware of the unpromising origins of this fabulous, pivotal track 26 years after the event. Were it not for the current obsession, via CD reissue, for the alternate-take, and hence the release of "Papa's Got A Brand New Bag" in its complete and previously unreleased, unedited, slow form, we'd be none the wiser.

I HAD always been amused that one of the guitarists from The Ventures learned to play by frantically trying to copy Les Paul's artificially accelerated and overdubbed guitar solos; now I realise that I've been fooled by technology too.

But if technology is one key to the deconstruction of songs over the last four decades, improvisation is another. In the 20th Century, how to separate the two? For Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, the song was its chords. "To make things tough for outsiders," bebop drummer Kenny Clarke has said, talking about the cutting contests at Minton's, "we invented difficult riffs. Some of our tunes used the 'A' part of one tune, like 'I Got Rhythm', but the channel came from something else, say 'Honeysuckle Rose'. The swing guys would be completely hung up in the channel. They'd have to stop playing." (*Bird Lives*, Ross Russell)

Improvisation was the method that elevated often mediocre popular songs onto planes of sublime invention. How much were these inventions bounded and influenced by the recording technology and duplication formats of the time? Recording allowed for retakes in the studio, yet 78rpm discs bounded the length of an improvisation, and perhaps the degree of captured deconstruction, within a certain minimal time frame.

With the availability of long play records, improvisations on popular songs could turn into beheadings, disembowelments, autopsies. Live tape-recordings of Charlie Parker or Lester Young jam sessions prove that jazz musicians had been skinning and stretching pop tunes in afterhours clubs for years, but the commercial release of these explorations made the process publicly available. Thus it was, between 1960 and 1966, we could all hear examples like the Ornette Coleman Quartet's dissection of "Embraceable You" and the John

Coltrane group's Village Vanguard immolation of "My Favourite Things".

But to experience the full, populist assassination of the pop tune during the 1960s, we would have to be in the recording studios, the discotheques and the psychedelic ballrooms, rather than the jazz clubs. The song was still iconic in pop, rock and soul - a launch pad, a connection with the audience and history, a symbol of the object to be dismantled - but the song as inviolate consumer product, radio soundbite and pleasure pill (to be popped) was under threat.

The imperatives of late 50s/early 60s dance craze fundamentalism (*do the swim, come on and mashed potato*, it's twine time, *now!*) suggested that music could be enchained as the master and slave of body movement.

Less than a decade later (under the spell of psychedelics or other drugs, electronics, Indian and African music) *Bitcher Brew* by Miles Davis, "1983 (A Mermaid I Should Turn To Be)"/"Moon, turn the tides . . . gently, gently away" by Jimi Hendrix, Terry Riley's *Rainbow In Curved Air*, Sly and the Family Stone's "Sex Machine", The Temptations' "Run Away Child, Running Wild", LaMonte Young's "Sunday Morning Blues", Velvet Underground's "Sister Ray" and John and Yoko's "Revolution No. 9" all predicated organically multiplying, fractal soundfields of music in their different ways, rather than music as evolving sculpture, the closed and preset cellular structure of verse, chorus and bridge.

A GAIN, RECORDING technology played a significant role in the evolution of this open form music. "Now there's no 'take one' etc.," Teo Macero told Ian Carr about the Miles Davis sessions of the late Sixties. "The recording machine doesn't stop at the sessions, they never stop, except only to make the play back. As soon as he gets in there, we start the machines rolling." As Carr additionally pointed out: "In his recordings from now on, Miles wouldn't start with the idea of set pieces; instead he would simply explore some fragmentary elements and edit them into a cohesive piece of music afterwards."

In Kingston, Jamaica, sound engineer King Tubby, the proprietor of Tubby's Home Town Hi-Fi sound system, was following the same route at roughly the same time to very different ends. "The dance lasted for hours," wrote Steve Barrow in his sleeve notes to *King Tubby's Special 1973-1976* (Trojan), "with those four Treasure Isle dubplates as the only music, dubbed up live and differently every time and with U. Roy, the High Priest, roasting new lyrics for every version."

The end of the 60s also marked the subterranean growth of gay Latin and black dance clubs in New York, marking the origins of disco mixing. Performance-based music crased the song through improvisation, repetition and extension. Dub and disco colluded with the song, enveloping it in its own



environment, hinting at its continued existence, melting it into a semi-anonymous web of pulse and chant.

After its first formative years, during which the global soundbanks were plundered for empathetic records, disco began to work on the principle of decomposing songs into modular and interchangeable fragments, sliced and repatched into an order which departed from the rules of Tin Pan Alley. This new order was designed to suit the nocturnal rhythms of a participatory, ecstatic audience, rather than any sense of consensual, concise, classic proportions demanded by pop listeners.

"I've noticed that the contrast has a funny reaction on people," pioneer disco mixer Tom Moulton told *Black Music* magazine in 1976, discussing his criteria for re-editing an already-existing song. "It's a hard driving thing, but all of a sudden there's all this beauty there at the same time. I notice things like that really turn people on. And what I also do is put in breaks if I can, 'cause that takes people even higher. It's down to flow."

YET WITHIN the liquid flow of sound systems and discos, dub and disco lived in symbiotic relationship to the song, offering deconstruction as an piquant alternative or a parallel experience to source material. So there was the original song, followed by the voiceless version and a theoretically endless chain of dubs, or there was the radio edit (the concentrated pleasure pill), to compare and contrast with the extended disco remix, the alternative mixes, the instrumental and the dub mix.

Gradually, such decomposing agents have taken the ascendant. After repeated plastic surgery, songs barely survive. They have been pulled into strings and globs of interchangeable matter, dissipative systems whose authors have been relegated to peripheral usefulness (or entirely forgotten) in the transformative sequence of versions. Songs survive, of course, because they can encapsulate big thoughts in small vessels, yet they are harder to write than ever and somehow, in their certainty and logic, less necessary than ever after all the years of disassembly. Nothing ever settles at a point of rest. Nothing is ever finished. For the time being, nothing is complete.

As songs have been dismembered, digital sampling has redistributed the amputated fragments. For a moment, technology captured human capabilities and locked them into machine behaviour. Inevitably, song evolution now encompasses the human imitation of the machine. Just as The Ventures once aspired to technological impossibility, so such musicians as The Future Sound of London record session singers *in order* to sample their voices, while singer Sheila Chandra imitates sample loops in order to avoid the hiatus that machine glitches impose on studio atmospheres. True or false? In 1988, James Brown sang "I'm real", but the razor blades and speed controls had already long thrown that desperate claim into doubt. ■



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# CAN I BE *f*RANK...?

MARK SINKER  
COMPARES TWO  
VERSIONS OF  
"MY FUNNY  
VALENTINE"  
AND WONDERS  
WHY THEY  
DON'T SING 'EM  
LIKE THAT ANY  
MORE.

THEY DON'T exist any more. The wisecracking songwriter duos of yore, the legends in pairs who took long-ago Broadway by storm — who knew how to craft a lyric with no voice in mind, *in particular*: but the idea that nonetheless someone, known or unexpected, would take their work and fill it with erotic, or heartfelt, or wordily, witty adult life. There's no one left to do it: no singers now calling for it. The song and the singer, *the song and the singer as they once were*, are both gone. There are, it seems, no more Sinatras.

If we want to understand why — instead of just meaning about how things aren't what they were — we have to acknowledge one of the few serious attempts to revive the craft-as-was in its fullest richness, operating right there in the mainstream, demanding and expecting the fullest popular response; and then we have to acknowledge the forces that dissipated it. And these are *not* merely the present generation's lack of will or taste or adequate talent. We need to understand how history itself, shaped by changing technology, rendered the project more or less unthinkable.

This attempt at revival/renewal starts with a half-forgotten b-side to a 1979 chart hit — "My Funny Valentine", the flip of "Oliver's Army", Elvis Costello and the Attractions' Radar single, UK #2 in February of that year. It peters out somewhere in the mid-80s — committed songwriters abound and indeed proliferate, but the unique moment passes; for all the will to revive the craft, and taste and talent for it,

*The way it was: Frank is mother, Dino says 'when'.*



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Costello's imitators and disciples opt to work in cult seclusion. At just the moment the 7<sup>th</sup> single picks to disappear.

"My Funny Valentine" was written by Lorenz Hart and Richard Rodgers for the Broadway musical *Babes In Arms*; Rodgers and Hart, who may have gone on to commit *The Sound Of Music*, a mid-60s tragedy, were in their time rightly fêted, twin pinnacles of their profession, accorded respect even by avant gardists like Coltrane or Milton Babbitt (actually Babbitt's more of a Jerome Kern fan).

Critical success on Broadway alone — whether or not you grant Broadway at its peak the Parnassian significance some allow it, in the tale of the Great American Popular Song — only rarely turned a song into a standard: as Robert Kimball (Cole Porter's biographer) suggests in his sleevenotes to Ella Fitzgerald's 1956 *The Cole Porter Songbook Vol. 1*, this LP on original release introduced Porter's songs to more people than any outlet before or since — certainly than the shows themselves. A standard was not yet simply an institution in danger of being superclubbed to death by third-rate Las Vegas showbiz smarters — more, as Fitzgerald's involvement suggests, an independent aesthetic object of value precisely insofar as jazz improvisers chose to explore it, its shape, its weight, its beauty, its uncharted inner workings.

Actually the turning point in the fortunes of many a song came when Sinatra rakkled it; his genius, at its late-50s height, being his ability to transmute the field of play from

harmonic and rhythmic abstraction into the elegant art of everyday conversation — in melody and meter, on-stage.

Today hyperbole enshrines Sinatra to the point of urbane mummification. In November 1953, when he recorded "My Funny Valentine", everything was still in play, in particular — as far as he was concerned — his future. He'd been a massive teen idol, but that was over: his only hope was to relaunch himself, beyond mere adolescent fashion, into the pantheon of Timeless Grownup Showbiz Greats. 1954's *Songs For Young Lovers* (with "Valentine" as its closing cut) was his opening shot, a record that made revolutionary use of the time available on the new microgroove 33rpm long-player, to simulate a mini-concert consisting of the songs of Porter, Rodgers/Hart, the Gershwins, the deathless titans of Pop's refined past. It didn't itself meet with unalloyed critical acclaim, or sales: but it got the ball rolling. By the time the great rock'n'roll catastrophe hit it, Sinatra was established — in profound opposition to whatever rock would come to mean, good or bad — as the colossus bestriding the whole world of (adult) Pop. "Valentine" will be a minor ally in this opposition.

THERE ARE certain superficial similarities between the situation Costello was fashioning for himself in the mid-70s and the one Sinatra found himself in in the early 50s, even though the latter was an idol in apparent decline, the other a nobody with no apparent prospects. In particular, Costello's

first chosen milieu, pub-rock, was one self-consciously dedicated, against the decadence and/or idiocy of its times, to the recreation of a better, more innocent, more energised age, the regaining of a youthful, rebel Eden of expression. Some pub-rockers merely reiterated the original language of 50s R&B, its dresscodes, its attitudes; those who thought more of it, and themselves, resorted to fondly knowing referential wit, a playfulness that often signalled pretensions to adult worth, and located them in just this sense of historical awareness. To be respectably worthy of career-survival into the future, smarter thinkers in the 50s and 70s both seemed to think, you had to have some kind of understanding of, and connection with, a recent Golden past.

The mid-70s is the age, also, of the gathering twilight of the 7", an apparent renaissance that will turn out to be a last bright gleam. The notion of record-collecting was by now making itself as strongly felt within rock – always before the music of the implacable here-and-now – as it had, since the 1940s, in jazz. (Stiff, Chaswick, Radar: these early pub-rock proto-punk indies were all associated with second-hand record marketstalls, with a yen for forgotten rock'n'roll, R&B, soul, even ska . . .)

Costello's early presence in this retro-world is deceptive: even he hardly knows how he's working, and with what; where and what he's true-aiming for. Pub-rock's mid-70s conservatism, its strict limits, in fact give him the freedom to be sardonically but unmistakably *modern*. He strikes poses in order to explore exactly what they *don't* represent. B-sides rather than A-sides, other similar moments of apparent inattention (the early bits-and-bobs work-in-progress compilation *Taking Liberties*, for example, later rereleased as *Ten Bloody Marys & Ten Hours Your Fathers*), provide the revealing clues. A consummate media manipulator, from choice of pop-name on in, there are of course no moments of genuine inattention in his work: feints, sure, and stammers and errors and deliberate fake-mistakes . . . But when he's being direct, he's at his most tricky.

On one level, alliance is being made with rock's acceptable classic past, its unpretentious canon: Lennon-McCartney, Spector, Stax, Sun, Motown. All of this – from Teen Symphony to country-soul – is cheerfully foregrounded, in Barney Bubbles' still unmatched PoMo sleeve design sign-language, in producer Nick Lowe's whole slap-it-together *schtick*. On top of this to be piled a discredited but salvageable tradition: the adult singer-songwriter (Randy Newman, Joni Mitchell, Scott Walker, Bruce Springsteen, Gram Parsons), working every approach from folkie-with-guitar self-involved sincerity, to its supposed opposite, the emotional manipulation of the quasi-orchestral arrangement, rock-songs-with-strings for scripted tears and smiles. These, as nods towards ways of growing beyond instant chart-triviality, are never quite respectable, never quite put aside (think of Simon and Garfunkel).

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never alluded to, but crucial to Costello's approach, the art-pop of Bryan Ferry's Roxy Music and David Bowie. By the late 70s, it's the received wisdom that a Ferry emotion is a fake emotion, that his pop-art PoMo pastiche offers at best an empty entertaining shadowplay of images, past and future. Costello's every attempt to reach out and touch a past style, often just as mannered and playful on the surface, is also an attempt to reach out and touch its original emotional core, to recreate, in full, in electric juxtaposition to the songs on either side (which reached and touched elsewhere). To recapture some of the sense, again, of Costello's deeply veiled audacity in tackling "Valentine" (and tackling it, we should note, with *total sincerity of interpretive intent*), think first of Ferry's brittle, ironic rock'n'schmooze juxtapositions on *These Foolish Things* of some years earlier, and then think of how very far they seem – and seemed in 1979 – from punk's then-raging attempt to combine forever all the "opposites" here on show, art and real life, sign and meaning. Putting "Sympathy For The Devil" next to "These Foolish Things" merely mocked and diminished all, in rock-think.

And especially in punk-think. The backdrop to Costello's emergence is a scorched-earth idealism, an insistence that *all* past pop-cultural expression is failed and compromised pop-cultural expression. And here's Costello reaching back, before the dawn of rock itself, to ally himself with a time and a kind of songwriting that *all* rock had *always* despised, rejected, defined itself against. In order – in part – to define *himself* against the shibboleths of his peers and his immediate predecessors; as much to find something untainted he could inject into pop, to save it from itself, its sense of utter failure. Costello never believed – as true punks did – that if rock was failed and dead, the world itself had no future.

For one thing, "Valentine" is a love song. For punk, to write love songs, in the face of a world full of evil, was to betray whatever was left of truth. Costello, no punk, no nihilist, still won't – can't – write one himself: at least not one that wasn't of and through some hideously damaged persona, from some deranged perspective. "My Funny Valentine" is a concise two-verse song – in which the proof of love is the refusal of flattery, faint praise, any conventional surface sign; with the rejection of such trivial allures as beauty, intelligence for the reality itself: that much more romantic in its forceful denial of mere romanticism. That it packs so much into so few words is a triumph of tight clarity – even in this looking-glass world of reversals and denials, there's no chance of mistaken meaning. For Sinatra, it's almost a throwaway; ironic adult love-play, as serious as it seems oblique and trivial. For Costello, all its opacity notwithstanding, it's strung out on



yearning – the only thing left, when all signs and portents are insisting it can't and mustn't exist: its deceptive surface negativism gets him off the hook, its deep openness still a perfect vehicle for his utopian sincerity.

WHAT SPURS him on and at the same time holds him back is politics, of course, a very different species of adult concern. He knows well enough what it is precisely in the earlier tradition that rock is failing to recognise the value of – but he's just as well aware of what rock faced up to that the earlier, supposedly more adult era significantly evaded.

The subject matter of a song like "Oliver's Army" – and the LP *Armed Forces* that it came from (more directly spoken to in its original, discarded title, *Emotional Fascism*) – is the irreducible evil that arises in personal and social relationships. Costello's 1977 (non-charting) single "Less Than Zero" aimed its spleen at a world where his canoeing with his girlfriend on her parents' sofa was a bad act, while they could be watching Sir Oswald Mosley given kidglove treatment on TV. Quite apart from the changed means needed to address such a topic (the changes in writing, singing and production strategy), this subject could not have arisen – and has not arisen – in mainstream popular music prior to rock. Even if rock – in the pejorative and dismissive sense folks like Costello were using the word in those angry times – has subsequently totally betrayed the possibilities it opened up.

And of course such a song would have been absolutely out of reach for Sinatra, even supposing for a second that he'd ever have conceived its possibility, let alone attempted it once conceived. Politics in popular song had burst up in the mid-60s, a huge, dark return of the repressed on the shadow-side of *awfulpalatobogusdramabombom*: along with rock'n'roll's original, joyful, thoughtless, meaningless yawns of here-and-now hedonism, reminders of exactly what it was that sophisti-

cated supperclub entertainment, however liberal, however enlightened, was itself being naive about. Hear it being avoided as Ella Fitzgerald sings Cole Porter's "Anything Goes". Porter, an iconoclast with private means and a deep ambivalence towards the milieu he made his living in, was as hip as anyone to the evils of his time, and as gloomily resigned to them. If anything remains of his naive Jazz-age utopianism, it's sublimated into his subversive, outrageous, punning songlyrics – in a very '20s way, the notion of a world without racism is touched on only flirtatiously, approached only obliquely, through sex: "the world's gone mad today, and good's bad today, and black's white today." Lynching is not some dim memory in 1956. In an age when so much more was left to the imagination, so that decoding sexual codes was the norm – life-and-death, if you were black in the South, said the wrong thing to the wrong white – Porter plays fast-and-loose with his (white) listeners' unacknowledged fears. It still may not seem much today, a riskless tourism. Think of all the times some well-meaning well-heeled fan calls for "Strange Fruit" of Billie Holiday. Think what it means for them – a vicarious emotional rush, kind of Oprah for middlebrows: think what it means for her, throwing all her craft into singing it truly, deeply, fully: over and over and over and over . . .

No surprise that antisong songs like Dylan's "Subterranean

Homesick Blues" or the Great Society's "White Rabbit" had such force when they suddenly arrived. The arrogant, irritant, speedy, sneeting whirf of the first, raging dada sicknote from the drone-rock beatnik underground, its ungraspably literate venom and studiously dysfunctional grammar proof the singer-songwriter knew something the grown-up world didn't; the open-ended, numbed-out near-formless near-mindless hunger of the second proof – in its desolate, dippy, wholly inarticulate way – of some inexpressible lack in pop and the world all around ("Remember: What the Dormouse Said: Feed your head"). If literate, elaborate, punning meaning can't encompass the evil abroad in the world, then meaning must expand, and perhaps change altogether.

60s groups wrote their own songs; sometimes – think of Iggy – no more than unfinished slabs of language, hurt grunts that they were living in and through. The weird rural hiccup of rock'n'roll (out of bathroom jazz-jump'n'jive) mutated into a sign for things missing in adult discourse, in the bedroom, in the courtroom, on the streets, on TV, in the Oval Office.

This – 65–68 – is the busy, unsustainable Golden heyday of the 7" 45; as Vietnam and Civil Rights give the lie to the America they've been sold, the kids of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society sent postcards home from inexpressible hell. As one, in

continued on 77



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# AT THE THARP

From Twyla Tharp to Michael Clark and back again,  
Allen Robertson tells how modern dance  
changed the music that went with it.

# END

How well the audience, hear music can determine how we respond to the choreography we see. The spirituals Alvin Ailey uses as the score for *Revelations* (1960) provide the emotional bedrock on which the movement is built. Tchaikovsky's score for *Swan Lake* does the same. And would Torvill and Dean have won the Gold Medal if they hadn't used *Bolero* to help built up their crescendo?

Leading American choreographer Twyla Tharp said she chose the recordings she used for her *Nine Sinatra Songs* (1982) because they seemed to her to represent the last time when men and women could relate to one another without violence, the last time when we could be openly romantic without appearing soppy or silly.

Throughout her career Tharp has been one of the major liberating forces in the ways music is used for dance. She had plenty of precedents, but she is the one who really opened up popular music as suitable accompaniment to serious dance. Tharp is incredibly savvy. She knows full well that audiences can be seduced by a song. Refusing to have her creativity shackled or put into arbitrary slots, Tharp has gone beyond the obvious and found new ways of shaping an audience's perceptions of rigorously intelligent movement via instantly recognisable music.

In 1973 she created *Dance Coope* for the Joffrey Ballet to a collage of Beach Boys tunes. In 1974 she used original Fats Waller recordings for *Sue's Leg*, in 1975 she turned to pop hits from rocker Chuck Berry for *Ocean's Motron*. She has also used, among others, Willie "The Lion" Smith, Art Tatum, Paul Simon, Supertramp and Springsteen — to say nothing of Bach, Haydn, Glazunov, Brahms and John Philip Sousa. Tharp has also commissioned scores from the likes of David Byrne, Glenn Branca and Philip Glass.

Like many of the best choreographers, Tharp is musically literate but she has never been a musical snob. Because she treats each of her composers with equal respect and without a hint of condescension, Tharp pulls off dances that few can match. Her movement devices for Chuck Berry would sit equally well with Schubert lieder.

Yet before Tharp started her eclectic experiments much of the musical repertoire was barred from consideration. No self-respecting modernist in the 1960s or '70s would have dared to dip back into the 19th-century for inspiration. When Tharp first did so, some members of the "knowing" audience automatically assumed the purpose was parody. They were (often still are) ready to see and hear any such work as a

send-up. Such attitudes short-circuit any chance of true emotional impact.

MUSIC PROVIDES atmosphere, emotional colouring to any movement. Identical steps performed by the same dancer to a Bach partita or Ice-T would be likely to elicit two very different responses from a viewer. This explains why certain types of music are invariably associated with certain types of choreography.

One of the strongest such alignments occurred when the American postmodern generation of choreographers began using the music of Philip Glass, Steve Reich and John Adams. Their rhythmic drive and steady pulse closely matched the choreographic concepts of artists such as Lucinda Childs and Laura Dean whose dances use increments of movement in the same sorts of building-block sequences as these composers.

Childs, who is widely regarded as a key figure in contemporary American dance, is something of a stranger to British audiences. Her company has regularly toured in Europe, but never in the UK. Her only work created for a British company, *Four Elements*, was staged for the Rambert Dance Company two years ago to a commissioned composition by Gavin Bryars. His powerful score with its burnished brass rhythms strokes Childs's choreography. Movement and music become a ribbon unravelling from a spool, with the smooth beauty of silk sliding across warm flesh. The outcome is delicate and weighty in a single go.

Composer Steve Blake does the same for Lea Anderson. His jazz score for her two groups, The Cholmondeleys and The



Featherstonehaughs, add a density and weight to movement that is often so clear it is all but transparent. Together they produce effects which neither would do alone.

Today, young choreographers such as Michael Clark take for granted a mix-and-match approach to musical tastes and styles. Clark is a leader in using constantly changing soundscapes which veer all over the musical map taking in such mavericks as Glenn Branca and The Fall. He is happy to butt hard rock up against movie music, classical scores against commercial jingles.

Most of us have been so acclimatised to sound-bite time-frames that we hardly even notice the jarring jumps. Like it or not, television has truly speeded up the pace at which we can sift and absorb information. Sometimes it feels as if the culture's patience is running out.

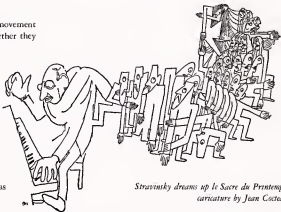
Clark's jumble-sale approach can be amusing, irritating, or even enlightening. In his recent *Modern Masterpiece* Clark took on that monolith of all dance scores, Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du printemps*. In 1913 it evoked a riot among the opening night audience. Since then, the score which kick-started the modern era in music has proven a fatal siren to dozens of choreographers. Clark, searching for a way to recapture the outrage of the Paris premiere, devised a half-hour prologue using a hodge-podge of loud rock (including punk Stravinskys The Sex Pistols), goofy costumes and gimmickry in order to get his audiences charged up and ready to confront Stravinsky's barbaric rhythms as if they were brand new once again.

Much has been written about the fifty-year collaboration between Stravinsky and choreographer George Balanchine. In addition to ballets, the two men also worked together on Broadway and even for Ringling Bros Barnum & Bailey Circus where Balanchine commissioned Stravinsky's "Circus Polka" for showgirls and elephants.

More than any other composer of our century, Stravinsky gloried in – instead of looking down his nose at – the dance. (He was also one of the first to take notice of jazz – but the relationship of jazz to modern dance is a whole other article.) He knew there existed the possibility that choreography could enhance (rather than distract from) his own creation. Many of his major scores were conceived to be seen as well as heard. The pit orchestra of Balanchine's New York City Ballet still plays more Stravinsky than any other band in the world.

The other major on-going collaboration of seminal importance to both art forms is that of Merce Cunningham and John Cage. This twosome has abandoned the traditional links between music and dance to create a new, free-wheeling approach that strives to give autonomy to both. In their creations music and movement operate independently, each according to its own rules. The links is meant to be nothing more than a sharing of time and space.

Cunninghams has described this way of working as an attempt to get beyond what he calls journalistic dances:



Stravinsky dreams up *Le Sacre du Printemps*; caricature by Jean Cocteau

choreography that does nothing more than report back to us what we are already hearing in the music.

CARRYING THAT sort of logic to its most radical conclusion, one arrives at dance performed in silence. When this happens dance becomes its own song – particularly if you're a percussionist. Twyla Tharp's *The Fugue* (1970) is a stunning example of this. Its score consists of a series of movement phrases composed of nineteen counts each. They are performed by a trio of women in high-heeled boots dancing on a floor that has been miked so that their percussive steps become an aural replica of the visual expression. The performers start each phrase together then go off on canonic variations only to be back in unison for each nineteenth beat. It is a dazzling metrical game that takes dance without music to an ultimate conclusion, turning the movement itself into its own soundtrack.

Allen Robertson is the Dance Editor at Time Out.

Dancer photo credits: London Contemporary Dance Theatre, Anthony Crickmore, pages 24-28; 36-40; 52. Rambert Dance Company, David Buckland, page 54. Kinross of Opus III, pages 25-48.

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# GREAT LOST RECORDINGS

*Hopey Glass reconsiders "My Happiness", the first moment of Elvis Presley's recorded career.*

HE RECORDED it for his mother's birthday: "My Happiness" (backed by "That's When Your Heartaches Begin"). Nonsense, some crowd, the birthday was months away. So it was for her wedding anniversary, that was coming up. Maybe it was, but the Presleys never owned a record player. They were poor, the poorest. Of course they owned one. With his mother loving music as much as him, he'd have scraped together enough. How else could he have slaked his obsession with stars high and low? How else could he have built his knowledge, of everything from the Blues to Dean Martin? His is the generation who learnt their music from disc, not airwave, not community hall, not grandpappy's knee; without a record player, he'd never be first among many leaping equals. He recorded it for himself. He knew what he was.

So why did the disc itself, this key item in an endlessly retold tale, wait so long to turn up? Mother Gladys died 1958; Elvis died 1977. In 1988, his longlost schoolchum Edwin Leek found the longlost acetate up in his attic, and came forward. His schoolchum who did have a record player (Elvis brought it over, said Leek, and forgot to take it home), and no very apparent nose for cashing in on a friend's heroic rise to prominence. At least not while it was happening.

And even then, no one made much of a fuss. Longlost or not, "My Happiness" – first public release 1990 – shattered no one's mastery-theory. Commentators bestowed themselves to point out that, yes, all known features were already in place in his reading of this desperately old-fashioned 1948 ballad (it could almost be a hymn from a hundred years earlier): he could sing already, but he was no get-real-gone crazy. Did Phillips come back to him because he liked his voice – or was it because Elvis was the studio's amphetamine supplier?

The voice is unmistakably his, from the first: always sort of a patchwork of ways to sing, a tracery of wide-gathered influences maybe transcended, maybe not quite fused. Here, though, it's a private sound, tender, nothing at all in it of the gauntlet he'll be enticed to fling down to the hazard of his own future. It isn't that caution or self-doubts abound: but there's a scrawny, nasal inflection to the high notes of it, a persistent stumble in the soft guitar. The accent of another Elvis, the one who failed to escape, the one whose acetate – and guitar – still gather dust in a friend's attic, the pinched ghost-voice of a countryboy whose beauty quickly withered in backbreaking poverty in Tennessee long ago. Because Phillips never found him; because his mom never loved him.

Legends surround themselves with legends. Elvis – most of him – happened in the noonday sun, with everyone watching, in front of radio-mikes and television's intrusive lenses. It may be that the slippy, fiddly, stubborn, stupid facts in this anecdote – among so many – aren't on a par with Sun, born on Saturn 3,000 years ago. But Alabama in the teens remains after all beyond the reach of media

glare, or easy latterday research. You'd have thought, from the way it wasn't fussed over, that people didn't want this disc found: didn't want the facts unearthed: not really. And maybe they didn't. Because you only have to hear it once to know that this is truly his total loving-to-his.

Elvis' mother Gladys is as demonised a power-behind-the-throne as any in rock. Even Yoko Ono (who can anyway look after herself) took less shit than the woman who died – of exhaustion, terror and mastery, if the photos are anything to go by – after giving birth, twice over, to Elvis Presley. Once as the younger twin brother of stillborn Jesse Garon; and then, aged 18, as the priapic SunGod of modern pop, the avatar of transcendent trans-gender energy that turned men into sex-objects also.

Overprotective? Or his only creative support? Did she smother him, leaving him rumously in emotional hock to her ghost his whole life long; or wasn't it more that her encouragement – her commitment to persuading him that he wasn't just trash – that propelled him up and out of his dirt-poor roots?

His father Vernon had been the gorgeous wastrel that Gladys threw away her own security of life for: in one body all the raggletaggle gypsies any wild girl had ever chosen poverty for. Gladys with Cherokee blood in her. This is being bearish, hubbilly style. Recall the stark, bruised terror in her face those last few years, after Colonel Parker drafts her son into the army, tames him, denies him the chance to be James Dean or Marlon Brando, what she's scared of isn't just Elvis has found a new (male) mom, but that the new one's so bad for the real one, the one she knows. Compared to her, Elvis loses her; and loses his wildness.

The supernannated lads, the lads who write and rewrite the rock histories, they may not much like Parker, but they *love* her part in this story, hate that Elvis might be right to see her the way he did. They see the shy, polite mother-loving teenager, and insist that this is everything he – and we – should be in flight from. They look at the strange glowing girl in him, the wild blackwhite tomboy in him, the bobbysoxer taking charge of her world (by losing control of herself) in him; they look at him moving like that, and still see (and hear) only the boy of it. Sissy vs rebel. Good vs bad. Motherlover vs homewrecker. Simple, simple, simple.

Simple it isn't, never has been: not for a moment since. We know that even Cliff Richard was for his looks and manner some kind of a Lesbian pinup (well, OK, very briefly): that the rock'n'roll sneer and the sensual hipthrust for a short while so derailed all simple sex-codes that who was turning who on came to bits. Presley walked the streets of Memphis dressed up bright and – for the times – bizarre, ambivalent, daring, his hair his pride: looking weird, drawing looks. Even on Beale Street, Memphis' own Greenwich Village, the hipster haven in that fast-changing no-longer-rural little city. He'd be walking down the street, and crowds would follow, laughing, pointing, angry, scared . . .

And then he " . . . made a record," as he once put it, "and you could hear folk around town saying, 'Is he, is he?' and I'm going, 'Am I, Am I?' Am I what? Black? Gay? A girl? From Mars? Deranged? My mom? All the above? America, rich in denial, blew apart when he made a record that faced them with things they didn't want to see or hear. Out of all the above, any of the above would do; countercultural convention picked what it felt most comfortable with. A record surfaces after 35 years, and all those left who want to tell themselves they're somehow his children – or his apostles – can't quite bring themselves to face how it sounds. A disc, sort of a home photo,

pre-fame, an aural snapshot of true in-family devotion, sung to Gladys or himself, or the young Gladys in himself, that says quieter gentleness can also be an unearthly force, that to enfold and nurture may not necessarily be to limit or suppress

I think I like this Elvis best of all. What's wrong with loving your mom?

*For more on Elvis, see Outlines at the end of Soundcheck.*



*No room to rhumba in a sports car? Image: Glenn A. Baker/Rodferns*

# THE TUNE JUNE

IN



**Jack Cooke  
digs into the  
lost history of  
June Christy –  
the 40s songbird  
who worked with  
Stan “Progressive  
Jazz” Kenton,  
sang the best and  
worst of Tin Pan  
Alley and still  
held a torch for  
Adult standards.**

JUNE CHRISTY was an important figure in a significant period of the history of popular music. She became prominent in the late 1940s and lasted through the 50s, but by the end of the 1960s (long before her death in 1989) she'd ceased to work regularly. This retreat coincided not only with the drying-up of what John Lewis likes to call 'the American ballad' but also the end of the more transient but once-lively tradition of Tin Pan Alley. Initially playing an important role in Stan Kenton's most controversial – and popular – period, she later, as a solo artist, exemplified many of the problems popular singers were beginning to have in finding audiences and material.

AGED 19, Christy had become the Kenton band's singer in the summer of 1945, replacing Anita O'Day. At this point it was a well-drilled outfit, derived from Jimmy Lunceford's – larger than average (to suit Kenton's own larger-than-life personality) but still basically a swing band competing with many similar.

She sang on five of the tracks recorded that July – the important one however, was "Tampico", a wry, sardonic little novelty number celebrating the doubtful attraction of what sounded like some exotic Mexican location (it was actually a World War Two US Navy Base) and the 'bargains' to be found there. It sold a million copies.

By November she'd recorded another number in that same genre with the band: "Shoo Fly Pie" (. . . and apple pandowdy/makes your eyes light up, stomach say 'howdy' . . .) was if possible even daffier than "Tampico". It sold another million.

Big hits aren't the first thing one associates with Kenton or his band; against the floodlit glare of his later, artier ambitions they tend to get overlooked – but they need to be acknowledged for a number of reasons.

For a start, they added massively to the band's economic viability, in an era when inflation was being felt, especially by the larger outfits. Added to this, they confirmed the newfound importance of records – the wartime V-Disc scheme had proposed the value of records as a means of retaining and developing cultural linkages, and Kenton's record company, Capitol, fresh into the post-war field, was intent on establishing itself as a major – even though radio was still perceived as the main channel of opportunity and sheet-music sales were

still used as a statistical base-line of popularity for the songs themselves. Kenton might well have grasped earlier than most the notion of the band, the records and the name as a unified and self-contained system of communication, but such successes nonetheless proved Christy a major asset within this set-up.

That she could sing was never in doubt. The million-sellers, however, hardly indicate her range or the factors that made her so individual. That evidence was elsewhere, most notably in two Ellington-derived songs recorded around this time. "Just A-Sittin' And A-Rockin'" (with Kenton) and "Prelude To A Kiss" (one of a mass of songs done with a small group drawn from the larger outfit) found her dealing first with a line more rhythmically than melodically driven, whilst the second required her to deal with the song's wide top-to-bottom range and difficult intervals.

Although the full richness of her lower register was yet to develop, the warm, husky mid-range and the distinctive vowels are clearly evident. So too is the virtual absence of vibrato on long notes – one of the factors that fitted her particularly for Kenton's style and gave her singing an intensely 'modern' patina. Finally, what sets her apart from those singers who thrived on rhythmic displacement (like O'Day) or harmonic restructuring (like Sarah Vaughan) is the unhurriedly conversational sense of time which enabled her to walk through a lyric and claim it as her own whilst leaving its shape relatively intact.

The trick was the employment of all of this, in order to



realise the singer's full potential. Enter Kenton's newly-acquired arranger/co-composer, Peter Rugolo. The first example of what would become a major shift of focus, recorded in the summer of 1946, was "Willow Weep For Me". Ann Ronell's ballad of distilled despair offered no hit-parade aspirations (death and woe were not chart constants in those days, though Artie Shaw's "Gloomy Sunday" had once nearly pulled off the trick). The song's dark emotions were fully exposed by Rugolo's dissonant score, and used all the resources of Christy's voice and delivery in a clear attempt at 'art-music' (with a capital 'A'), confined nevertheless within a popular-song form.

It was the start of a transition which ended in February 1947 when Rugolo put a spectacular full-stop behind Christy's association with the pop novelties (which had continued to flow through the band's book like a financial lubricant): he unveiled his crowded, raucous setting of Joe Greene's surreal and apocalyptic miniature, "Across The Alley From The Alamo".

DURING THIS phase "Progressive Jazz" was beginning to replace "Artistry In Rhythm" as the band's trading banner, though the process was interrupted when Kenton melodramatically announced his retirement in the late Spring of 1947 (on the grounds of physical and mental exhaustion).

It didn't last long; by September he was back in the studio putting together the material for the album-bound set of 78s that relaunched the band and celebrated the "Progressive Jazz" tour (this tie-in of tours, records and titles indicates Kenton's quick appreciation of a relationship really only widely 'discovered' much later by rock musicians).

Inevitably, the 'art-song' concept returned to the agenda. "Lonely Woman", Rugolo's setting of a song written in England by Benny Carter and Ray Sonin years previously, and the recitative "This Is My Theme" were both included in the album. Here again, morbid material is explored to an accompaniment of oil-and-vinegar scores dominated by strenuous trumpet-section work and George Weidner's curiously sinuous alto, placing heavy reliance on Christy's ability to work convincingly against frequently perplexing backgrounds.

Equally fascinating, however, is some of the more pop-orientated material that Christy and Rugolo chose to do. Joe Greene's "Soothe Me" had lyrics of, for the time, an intensely sexual nature, whilst "Curiosity" concerned itself with a less knowing but still essentially sexual theme. Equally, two further songs, "I Told Ya I Love Ya (Now Get Out)" and "He Was A Good Man As Good Men Go (And As Good Men Go He Went)" reveal a proto-feminist attitude rare within the genre, and a cynicism about notions of fidelity which contrasts strongly with post-war romanticism and reflects the reality of the uncertainty of the period and the volatility of social arrangements. To my knowledge, such songs have never been studied from a serious perspective, but it's there for the taking.

For one thing, it throws light on the liveliness of popular



song in this period, and how directly it speaks – and sometimes subversively – to its audience. Put it together with the dark emotional tones of the more consciously 'artistic' material, and maybe – even though unlikely – it says something about a certain receptiveness to modern music, because it was at this point that Christy began to be successful in the 'female vocalist' category of numerous popularity polls.

Although she was thus edging towards a solo career, Christy toured with Kenton again in 1950 as part of the gigantic 'Innovations In Modern Music' orchestra; again two items, Kenton's own – wordless – "June Christy" and Rugolo's setting of "Lonesome Road" were included in the 12" 78s that both announced the tour and – by virtue of their 12" quality format – implied its 'classical' aspirations.

Whilst both pieces stand as a reminder of Christy's versatility – in the tribute named for her she's the only melodic strand against a background of rattling percussion – neither track is particularly satisfying. They don't have the conviction of "Lonely Woman" or retain its clear 'art-song' format, nor do they have the effervescent drive of the more popular offerings. They lack any kind of emotional or communicative edge: the voice, exceptional though it is, is offered only for itself.

Yet at the same time a modest single crept out under Christy's own name. Here, Rugolo's smaller-scale setting of "I'll Remember April" exploited to the full the singer's ability to handle long notes, the rich middle register and the ability to manipulate a melody without distorting the sense of the lyric.

Now finally she launched herself on a solo career. However for a number of reasons this proved to be by no means the end of her association with Kenton or his music.

By the time the 1950s had begun, singers were coming

to dominate the popular-music market. The vast numbers of big bands that functioned in the immediate post-war years had in any case begun rapidly to disappear due to changes in the socio-economic climate which made it difficult to sustain such a labour-intensive entertainment system. Television, rapidly developing but still with a nine-inch screen and head-in-a-box focus on the visual as much as the aural, strongly favoured a solo artist's presentation. Christy's move to single-artist status was therefore not only well timed but maybe also had a degree of inevitability about it.

In 1953 she had a major hit. "My Heart Belongs To Only You" was (and remains) a song of stunning banality. It seems too far removed in time to represent any kind of reaction to the provocative or innovative material of the later Kenton years, more a reflection of the increasingly conservative attitudes of the early Eisenhower years. Yet it had its own timeless quality: with its simple, easy-to-sing line and transcendently clichéd lyric it could have served without alteration a quarter of a century later as a vehicle for Ken Dodd (and probably gone to Number One again).

Maybe it was simply a matter of getting on the scoreboard within Capitol's extensive roster of women singers, where there was plenty of competition: Peggy Lee and Jo Stafford also had hits with the label, whilst Kay Starr had several. Nellie Lutcher and Julia Lee did well too, but worked a different side of the operation.

The song was still big when Christy returned to the fold to appear as featured artist on the Kenton band's first European tour in 1953 (the first of many reprises of that association). What was a relatively innocuous set was enriched, however, by the inclusion of Bill Barnes' awesome "Something Cool" (also the title of her first solo album). With its stop'n'go melody line and ambivalent, eminently deranged lyric, this was a complete *film noir* of a song, exploiting Christy's conversational technique into an insinuating and unsettling mood.

The conjunction of these two performances, and the dichotomy between the dangerous and the banal thus highlighted, indicates a continuation of the breadth of range she had displayed in the Rugolo era, but while Rugolo continued to write many orchestrations for her, a much more conventional type of output became evident during her solo career. It would be easy to ascribe it to a simple failure of imagination on Christy's part, but there are other factors to be considered.

For a start, night-clubs and theatres were by no means the ideal forum for an aesthetic developed within the concert-platform context of the Rugolo-Kenton era. Even more importantly, the entire nature of the popular song — and singing — began to change radically in the mid-1950s. New and urgent ideas about mainstream popular music began to be expressed — even if they didn't formulate them — by Bill Haley, Buddy Holly and Elvis Presley for the rock'n'roll generation.

The 'quality' market survived, at the cost of being marginalised; sophistication had become reservation, with an audience that had begun to age where it had retained enthusiasm

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Heard claims  
to know jack  
about the  
wired world of  
Techno (but  
plenty about  
the mysteries  
of House).

Louise Gray

lets Mr Fingers do the talking . . .

# DO THE WASHING MACHINE

SEVEN YEARS ago, as the first stirrings of House music were heard in this country, there was one track that stood out on the tatty advance cassette that London Records, via Chicago independent label, DJ International, were handing out to the press. No, actually they were all notable, from Farley Jackmaster Funk's "Love Can't Turn Around" to Chip E's "Godfather Of House Music", but it was "Mysteries Of Love", a slow, spacious dreamscape over which a visceral vocal floated, that was different. Of all the early House music, Fingers Inc.'s "Mysteries" was the only track that existed outside any reference to the old House ancestors disco, electro, Philly and soul. It was as if Larry Heard (Mr Fingers himself), and the two vocalists (Robert Owens and Ron Wilson) who together comprised Fingers Inc., had dropped out of the sky.

Even so long after the landing, Heard's name remains a byword for innovation amongst club musicians. Fingers Inc. followed "Mysteries" in 1988 with *Another Side* (Indigo), House music's first (and best) album. Returning to his Mr Fingers solo persona, he then restated much of his early electronic work with the *Amnesia* album (also Indigo), 12 drum and keyboard tracks that provided House with a blueprint (and were, for all their technology, starkly emotional). Yet with the recent release of his debut for MCA, the Mr Fingers album *Introduction*, Heard is turning his spacey landscapes over to jazzy fusions and (finally) songs.

THIS WILL be, for those used to the strict musical segregation of most British clubs, a little hard to take. Yet Heard was never, in any Detroit sense, a Techno musician. A journeyman musician who had played daps in R&B, jazz fusion, rock bands, his listening has always been eclectic.

"George Duke, Rodney Franklin, Mahavishnu Orchestra, Chick Corea's Return To Forever. A lot of local people like Judy Roberts and Nightwind. I was always heavily into Genesis – yes, really – and Rush, and good keyboard players. I liked Rick Wakeman. And then Yello, Kraftwerk. Right now," and here he holds the telephone set out to his living room, "I'm listening to the Yellowjackets. You familiar with 'em? Jazz-fusion."

Learn that all this lot are grafted onto the tree that bore Fingers Inc. and suddenly the alien associations just teleport away, *Star Trek*-fashion. The music that grew into Techno grew organically, after all.

Actually, it's no good trying to get Heard to explain his own importance within House music: "Jack means nothing to me", he's said, referring to the then pervasive *j-j-jack it up* House style in an 1988 interview. "Still doesn't", he says four years on. There go, in one sweep, the early House crowd of Chicago – Marshall Jefferson *et al* – with whom Heard was still associated, within a scene that had not yet developed a semantics to sort out its constituent parts: Deep House, Acid House, Techno. Of that seminal, loose and gloopy track that reverberated around the world's dancefloors: "Washing Machine" was just a recording of me fooling around with a synthesiser and changing the different modes. It wasn't intentionally an acid track."

So what was it?

"Something I liked."

"These tracks – 'Mysteries of Love', 'Can You Feel It', 'Washing Machine' – were impromptu. There was no real formula to them. I don't subscribe to [the idea that] music is supposed to be this, and supposed to be that, and produced like that and all." His voice drops to a whisper now. "It's just



## HEARD

expression. And that's what the production is, whatever I'm thinking at the time. That's what it is, no matter what a specialist may say about it."

So, were those tracks intended to be dance music?

"Nah, not really. The formulation of 'Mysteries Of Love' is jazzy. That bassline," and he sings the notes of the shifting riff down the Chicago-London telephone line, *boom-boom-lm-lm-boom*, the electronic delay producing a ghost of a sound for each note, "is a jazz line." An arch snigger follows. "Put some strings over it. Make it pretty. Keep it simple. Didn't go away out with it. That was the expression at the time."

What words would he use to describe his music? There's a silence, an unease on the line, and then: "I don't know, I really don't know. It's got like a jazz feeling to it, but it's danceable, and now, at least, there's this R&B structure, so I'm at a loss for words. Other people say they hear jazz in the air; gospel, too."

AT THIS point, several analyses suggest themselves. One, that Larry Heard is a shy, retiring character, best left at home with his record collection and his keyboards and his rabby, Top Cat. It's grey, and he loves it. (In fact, MCA, his main British label, had advised me that kitty-talk in the interview was a way to get Heard himself to purr.) Two, that he sees his early work as successful accidents, more luck than design, and thus immune to the probes of subsequent verbal inquiry. Or three, that Heard himself is so uncomfortable a frontman that he prefers to create this intangible thing, music, to act as his interlocutor.

"I do things by feel . . . A lot of times, if I try to describe my music to people, I don't really get through to them. If they hear it, nine times out of ten they like it".

This is certainly as specific as his conversation gets. Typically, Heard has always chosen others to interpret his songs. One of these, Robert Owens, (who in 1990, moved over into Frankie Knuckles' apartment in New York City and has subsequently released masterly material like "I'll Be Your Friend" and "Visions") is also a practised employer of such vague-speak, invariably talking in terms of soul, spirituality and meaningfulness, even when his singing style – a stream of sexualised darkness – is eloquent enough to make *everybody* else (James Brown, Barry White, Prince included) sound like virgins. "Can You Feel It", an early Fingers Inc. instrumental, when re-released in 1988 with Martin Luther King Jr's *I have a dream* speech superimposed on it became a House anthem. In *On Top Of The World* (Big Life), the ecological-theme album made by Heard and Harry Dennis (in their partnership as It), Dennis declaims across the music, in what Heard calls a "Gil Scott Heron kind of situation". Elsewhere, Heard has produced songs by British artists Adamski and Electrice 101, and talks of his present desire to write for Brit club/soul singer Omar: offered his dream ticket, he'd work with arch-fusioners Rex Ayers, Rodney Franklin, Phyllis Hyman, Jean Carne, Dexter Wansell, Broad New Heavies and ("definitely") the Young Disciples.

Indeed, this present incarnation of Mr Fingers was presaged by Lil Louis' debut album, *From The Mind Of Lil Louis* (London, 1989), on which Heard took ample co-production and writing credits. The experimental, kid-at-the-controls electronics of Fingers Inc. were shed for a style that combined a low-level jazz funk with Heard's typically spacious structure. *Introduction* hones the process further. Although the album features two Owens-led tracks, the emphasis (as shown by its two singles, "Closer" – which took top slot on *Billboard's* dance charts – and "On A Corner Called Jazz") is on an unhurried, casually jazz vibe. For the first time, Heard takes over as lead vocalist. The change wrought by solo work is evident in the song structures. "I am putting more thought into the writing now, instead of going with the first idea, I try to structure it more, try to copy the R&B format. To make it a little more accessible to the mainstream."

MAINSTREAM, PRESUMABLY, equates with getting paid, comprehensible business deals and a move out of cult status. "Mysteries Of Love" was a typical novice-label tragedy. Released originally on Heard's own Alleviated label, selling 30,000 plus, then re-released on DJ International. "That deal was a . . . learning . . . experience," Heard remembers now. "But getting paid wasn't actually our main focus; we were more interested in getting some material out. And we had jobs, too. I worked with social security administration at that time. I was a benefit authoriser until 1988, when *Another Side* came out. After that, I quit to go into music full time. That's probably a reason why the more recent stuff sounds more worked out. Before, music was just after work and at weekends."

Now it's a full-time affair. While Mr Fingers is recording a second album for MCA, Heard is planning a new It concept with Dennis and signing up acts – two are confirmed: Club Ice and Quiet Storm – for release on a new label in association with Rene Gelston's Blackmarket label in London. Although Fingers Inc. officially split in 1989, Heard continues working with Ron Wilson and his presence is felt on all Owens' projects.

Of Chicago, nothing changes. The worldwide success of House music has left the radio waves unaffected. "We've sold records here, but House music has always been seen as a taboo here. Even disco was taboo; it was perceived as very gay, very drugs, very black, and House music was seen the same way. So you have to be a gay, black drug addict to go dancing. Who made that rule?"

An unscrupulous thought occurs: is Heard wilfully changing his labels around as a way to bear his city's antipathy towards House music? No, he doesn't need to. Record-company clerks describe his audience profile to him: "(They) say it's the typical working stiff that buys the albums. Not real young kids, high school age, it's the older people. Ageing club-goers, I guess." Moreover, Larry Heard has always defiantly avoided the strictures of any definition. There's jazz in the air, some R&B, some hear gospel. It's just . . . expression. ■

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# THE VELVET OVERGROUND

FROM 40S CROONER THROUGH 50S KING OF COOL TO 80S WAS (NOT WAS) CAMEO AND BEYOND — MEL TORMÉ HAS ALWAYS KEPT A JUMP AHEAD OF THE IN THING.

KENNY MATHIESON OVERVIEWS THE VOICE THEY CALLED THE VELVET FOG.



MEL TORMÉ made his stage debut at the age of four, when a band-leader at the Blackhawk Restaurant in his native Chicago spotted the youngster singing along in the front row with his parents, and invited him on-stage. He became a popular Monday night feature with the band, and pulled down 15 dollars for his troubles.

It was an unlikely beginning to an extraordinarily varied career. If his main fame rightly rests on his genius as a singer, where he rates alongside Sinatra, Fitzgerald and Vaughan, Tormé has also made his mark, at one time or another, as a child radio star, actor, television presenter (he hosted one of the first ever daytime talk shows on American television), songwriter, arranger, drummer, novelist and general writer.

Tormé, who added the accent to his name (an Ellis Island-imposed Americanisation of the Russian name Torma) in High School because "it looked classy", began as a pop singer in the crooner era, notably with the rather sugary vocal group The Mel-Tones, and enjoyed a huge following in the late 1940s. His light, feathery baritone earned a string of extravagant sobriquets from the famous New York disc jockey Fred Robbins, including "Mr Butterscotch" and the one which stuck, "The Velvet Fog".

Thereafter, though, he increasingly pursued a more jazz-oriented style of singing, and set about shrugging off this well-meant but unwelcome tag.

"I SHIFTED gear in 1955 when I made some records with Marty Paich for Bethlehem Records," Tormé recalls, "and that was really my transitional period into becoming a jazz-oriented singer. I have extended my range by about four notes at the bottom and six notes at the top, and my whole

approach to singing, certainly in the so-called jazz mode, is totally different from the kind of wispy, foggy singing I used to do back in the 1940s, and right on into the 1950s.

"When I hear the early records I made, compared to how I sound now, I actually think the very timbre of my voice has changed inordinately. To me, they sound like two different people. I think I am a far more robust singer than I was back then, and I sing from my diaphragm rather than my throat."

Tormé's beautifully judged phrasing and acute rhythmic sense (he wanted to be a big band drummer, and still plays rather flashy drums at every opportunity) is steeped to the hilt in jazz, but the singer is less convinced that he can be called a jazz singer as such.

"I'm not sure that there is such a thing as a jazz singer, and that even goes for Ella Fitzgerald, whom I worship. I think we are all basically singers of the popular song as we know it, it's just that people like Ella and the late Sarah Vaughan and a few others — and I guess I'm one of those — are more jazz-oriented or jazz-influenced than the average middle-of-the-road pop singer, and that is why we are categorised as jazz singers.

"I'm not against that, in fact it's very flattering, but I'm just not sure it's a proper appellation. I think to be a pure jazz singer you would really have to be the alter ego of a horn all the time, working in a sort of permanent scat-singing mode rather than singing lyrics, and frankly I think that would get very boring for the listener."

He's less happy about his recorded legacy, his dissatisfaction not ending with a dismissal of early efforts with the Mel-Tones, beginning with a version of "White Christmas" on Jewel in 1944. He recorded for Decca (1945), Musicraft (1946–48), Capitol (1949–53), and Coral (1953–54), before



DAVID REDFERN

## TORMÉ

the Bethlehem sessions with Paich (1955–57), sides for Decca UK, Philips, and Tops, prior to signing with Verve in 1958, after a five year gap, to Atlantic (1962–63), to Columbia (1964–65), and after a further gap, to Capitol again (1969–70) (plus a couple of sides for London in the early 1970s). Then, 30 years on, he cut what he now claims to be the first album which satisfied him.

"I can literally pinpoint the first record that I was really proud of as a singer, and that was an album called *Live At The Maitette* in 1974. I am proud of the Marty Paich records from the mid-1950s because the arrangements are brilliant, but I just wish the singing was better.

"I wish I had evolved and matured more when I got to the point of making those things, but I didn't have enough control of my vibrato, and while my range was okay for a popular singer, it was a little bit limiting. I didn't explore the possibilities enough at that time, although I worked hard to stretch that range later. I don't think anything I have done since then is anything to be ashamed of – some are better than others, but in general I think the output since then is pretty good."

Much of that output, and all of it since 1982, has been on Concord Jazz, usually in the company of pianist George Shearing, with a couple of collaborations with arrangers Marty Paich and Rob McConnell thrown in. Tormé believes he has found a sympathetic recording home of the kind too often denied him in the past, notably during the 1960s.

"I didn't like Atlantic or Columbia, or the later things I did at Capitol, because they were all bent in pitting me against the good pop singers of the day, which was foolish. It wasn't my bag, and I had matured in a different way to the requirements of that music. If people wanted, for example, "Games People Play", they were better buying Joe South's version.

"The A&R work on those albums was nothing less than bloody stupid, and it was only when I moved to Gryphon (for two albums in 1977–78), and then to Concord, that I found the freedom to do what I want, and to sing what I feel I am credible singing."

WHILE TORMÉ is right to dismiss many of the recordings in the 50s and 60s as not being up to his highest standards, his blanket condemnation does no justice at all to the best of them. His singing on some of the Verve recordings, including *Swing! Schubert Alley* (with the Paich Dekette) and *I Dig The Duke! I Dig The Count!* (with Johnny Mandel), is amongst the best he has ever done. For proof, check the current Compact Jazz compilation *Mel Tormé*, culled from the Verve sessions.

The singer's treatment of the standard repertoire is a highly original one, even though his propensity for jazz, and for experimenting with different treatments of a song, landed him in trouble with one of his idols, Richard Rodgers. The famous composer had very firm ideas of how his songs should be sung, and took exception to what he saw as a cavalier treatment of

"Blue Moon" at a rehearsal.

"I never sing anything the same way twice, and that led to me being crossed off Rodgers' list. Years later, when David Frost did a television tribute to him, Rodgers wouldn't have me on the show because he felt I had taken liberties with his music."

As it happens, Tormé was in good company on the reject list, sharing it as he did with Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald and Peggy Lee. Like those singers, and as he suggested in his comments on Atlantic and Columbia, Tormé is most comfortable singing standards, leavened with his own compositions and a smattering of contemporary songs by the likes of Donald Fagen, Janis Ian, Billy Joel or Stevie Wonder. For the most part, though, he feels modern songs do not suit his style.

"I can tell you right now that I don't think they do, with an occasional exception. I believe the grave mistake for mature singers is to try to keep up with the youth market. You then find yourself singing lyrics which are plainly inane, but more importantly, are aimed at young singers. When an older person sings them, they are simply not credible."

These days, though, it is difficult to refute Tormé's belief that he is singing as well as, if not better than, ever. At 65, his control and phrasing remain immaculate, while his superbly malleable voice and acute rhythmic sense enable him to glide smoothly – without a wisp of fog – through even the most densely-tangled of orchestrations, an area he maintains control of by the simple expedient of writing his own.

"I have written all my own orchestrations since 1963, and I don't work with outside arrangers any more, except that I do an occasional date with Marty Paich, who is one of my mentors as an arranger. In that case, I will give him some ideas about things I want to sing, but he writes the arrangements, and I have nothing at all to do with that. The same thing applied when I worked with the marvellous Canadian arranger Rob McConnell a few years ago. It was collaborative from the standpoint of the preparation of it, but the physical writing was all down to Rob."

Tormé's secondary career as a writer of books rather than music or songs includes an acclaimed account of working with Judy Garland, *The Other Side Of The Rainbow*, and a novel, *Wynner*, as well as his autobiography *It Ain't All Velvet*, and the "warts and all" biography of his friend Buddy Rich, *Traps – The Dram Wonder* (Oxford in the US, Mainstream in the UK).

"Writing is not a sideline. I have been writing for a long time, I think longer than many people realise. Writing has been an adjunct to the singing, of course, but I don't think of it as a hobby or an avocation, but as a very strong branch of what I do, and what I enjoy doing.

"Singing is the main thing, though, and I still love to perform. The minute I don't, in fact, I'll be off that stage, but I am having the best time of my career so far right now, and it would be crazy to think of quitting just when I am having that kind of success." ■

or, where young and fresh to music, saw this sector as an elitist preserve.

The one instance in this period where Christy steps clear of constraints came with the 1955 *Duet* album, which reunited her with Kenton again, but this time as a solo voice with piano accompaniment. Such a format is always an exposed, high-risk venture, perhaps particularly in view of Kenton's instrumental style, fairly limited technically yet prone to extravagance, with, at best, a kind of engaging vulgarity. Nevertheless it worked, the trills, arpeggios and emphatic chords serving to underline Christy's restraint, flexibility and interpretive skills.

To an extent the album calls for comparison with the voice-and-piano set made by Ella Fitzgerald and Ellis Larkins in 1950 (at the end of a long Decca contract packed with unsuitable material). That set may well have provided the inspiration for Christy's venture. Certainly one song is common to both sets, Gershwin's "How Long Has This Been Going On?", and this is revelatory. Against Fitzgerald's rather surprised intimacy, which goes with the grain of the song, Christy sets a more distant but intensely sensuous and subversively knowing reading. Clearly it states that this is not the softly-lit, after-hours performance proposed by Fitzgerald, but a recital: it has aspirations to fine rather than applied art.

Though sourced mostly from the night-club circuit in terms of material — a good proportion of it from what proved to be a final, often sardonic generation of traditional songsmiths (Bobby Troup, Matt Dennis, Joe Greene), plus a rich reprise of


"Lonely Woman" — it rejects emphatically any commoditisation of song or singer and remains an important, though generally overlooked document in the history of vocal music within the jazz tradition.

Unfortunately the same can't be said for the 1959 album *Jane Christy Recalls Those Kenton Years*. It's partly the concept, which makes you realise that the 'heritage' notion of plundering your own — or indeed someone else's — past glories has been around for longer than you might think. Certainly it reinforces the nostalgia content which increasingly underlay the periodic returns to the old firm. Also, ironically, it emphasises how Christy's contribution to a fascinating period in popular music came to be undervalued, for it was difficult at the time to see clearly, within the cloud of controversy that surrounded and surrounds Kenton and his music and his ambitions, how those conditions were set which provoked the singer's most consistently intriguing and broadest range of expression.

Within all this, however, there are hints of a flagging career painfully emphasised by the several hints of frailty in Christy's voice: snatched phrasing, an increased huskiness, more vibrato and less certainty in the extremes of her register. The version here of "Willow Weep For Me" is particularly poignant, with Rugolo also bowdlerising his original arrangement by the use of an edge-softening vibraphone in place of the stark clank of Kenton's piano. It's a great singer looking back over some of her finest moments . . . and saying goodbye to them and to the best of her voice. ■

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# TAKE ME TO YOUR LIEDER

Brian Morton lifts the lied on Schubert's great song cycles.  
(That's enough lied-ins — Ed.) Illustration: Chris Robson

AT FOURTEEN, something took my breath away. Bronchitis started it, a humiliating nine weeks of it, marooning me on a rocky bed with a pile of books and an old stream radio. It was there I discovered, between the foreign stations, and at the place on the dial still marked THIRD, what was and remains the finest body of vocal music ever written. Each night before closedown, Radio Three played a single Schubert *lied*, sometimes with a brief contextualisation, more often with a hurried, clock's-against-us summary of title, Deutsch number and the poet from whom the text had been drawn.

They were perfect nocturnal soundbites, brief and delivered in the unfamiliar language that haunted that particular band of airwaves. As nights went by, each song became a tiny epiphany, a self-contained, almost hermetic expression of experiences and emotions whose actual occasion could only be guessed from the blunt cadence and unexpected liquidity of the German words. I'm still convinced that this is the only way to listen to Schubert songs: one at a time, preferably in darkness, with no initial preconceptions as to subject or theme. The two great cycles, *Winterreise* and *Die Schöne Müllerin*, and to a lesser extent the *Schwanesong*, really do need to be listened in their entirety, and the first is one of the very great artistic experiences, but the considerable body of songs is best approached singly and unchronologically.

In later years, I patiently bought Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau's massive "complete" edition (he omitted those songs which call for a female persona) and left it largely unplayed, a passive monument to a lasting obsession. The songs were still best encountered by surprise, and in contexts where the slighter and lesser known were not swamped by one or two of the more acknowledged masterworks, like "Die Forelle" or "An Die Musik". Schubert recitals have enjoyed terrific market resiliency, but there is a pointless revisionism to much of the available material (with the greatest songs, a single arpeggiated chord or altered tempo screams out and swamps almost every other consideration). Schubert's bicentenary is now five years away, but the most important documentation of his vocal work since Fischer-Dieskau is already under way. The Schubert scholar Graham Johnson is recording *all* the songs, and releasing them in a sequence of 35 single CDs, each one carefully programmed

to combine the masterworks with less familiar material. Johnson will accompany every performance, as Gerald Moore did for Fischer-Dieskau, but he will be using the widest possible range of male and female voices to give the songs the timbral and dramatic variability that they so obviously demand.

John Keat once referred to *Paradise Lost* as the "Great Wall of China" cutting across the progress of English epic. Johnson quotes Schubert's question: "What can one do after Beethoven?" and it's no more than obvious to re-direct the question back to him. The sheer bulk of Schubert's song output is prodigious. Mandyczewski's *Gesamtausgabe* of 1894 lists a staggering 603 songs; variants, "lost" songs and those without texts, arias, choruses and partsongs probably account for upwards of another hundred. This from a man who died at 31 — possibly of syphilis, more likely of one of the many fatal infections which are impossible to diagnose archaeologically — with nine symphonies and a mass of other music under his belt. Though Zelter and others had written art songs before Schubert (and Goethe is supposed to have preferred the Zelter settings at first hearing) it was Schubert who created a form that combined the immediacy of popular and folk song (and often suble harmonic modulations that went with orally-transmitted narrative music) and the structural grandeur of classical form.

A song like "An Die Musik", written in the "symphonic" key of D major, has an immediacy and unity of aesthetic purpose and impact that makes it iconic, entire, apparently completely free of any reference outside itself. Works in that key's minor counterpart express on the contrary a desperate,



questing intensity that belies any suggestion that Schubert's creativity was an untroubled conduit of pure melodic invention. There are songs that remain in a single key for many pages, and others that change within a line of text, or that modulate between a fixed major key and an uncertain chromatic atonality that anticipates the late, late Romanticism of Schoenberg.

Schoenberg found to his surprise and delight that he gained nothing by reading and learning the poetic texts on which Schubert based his music. The songs convey (to borrow out of the words of another great synthesizer, Ezra Pound) "an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time". Their use of tonality as an expressive shorthand (F major for the natural cycle, E flat for religious awe, C for romantic themes, and so on) is saved from triteness by a firm dramatic dialect and sense of irony that turns each and every perceived characteristic into its opposite. The "through-composed" songs, perhaps ironically, depend on a more obviously codified repertoire of onomatopoeic effects, which to modern ears can sound slightly lame, but there is never any mistaking the dramatic thrust of the songs.

Schubert is inexhaustible and profoundly *adult*, in the sense that neither his affirmations nor his imitations of the tragic are ever narrowly personal. *Winterreise* ends with the traveller being denied a place in an inn whose "green wreaths" clearly suggest the hospitality of death. Schubert's art is instinct with life that it reaches no false resolutions, accepts no easy comforts. The songs are one of the great intellectual disciplines.

Graham Johnson's complete edition of the Schubert songs, volumes 1-15, are available on Hyperion records. Further volumes follow later this year.

# Reference Books

*Hefty tomes studied and shelved by Brian Priestley*

REFERENCE BOOKS come in different shapes and sizes but, if they're any good, they're all heavy. Having four recent efforts thrust at me by the Editor must have saved a fortune in postage, but was almost worth the hernia.

The spiral-bound *Jazz Musicians Guide 1991* (Jazz Services, 5 Dryden St, London WC2E 9NW, £13.95 plus £1.50 p&hp) is addressed to only a portion of our readers but will be of interest also to agents, mediapersons, specialist record-companies and venue and festival organisers. All of them and their colleagues are listed with, in the case of venues, comments by musicians on their suitability. The current edition draws on a database which has been compiled and revised over a period of something like five years, and is well organised and legible despite the use of some very small print.

Print is smallest of all in the amazing *Bildfelder Katalog 1992*, a sturdy-bound paperback also issued on CD-ROM (DM27.80 from Vereinigte Motor-Verlage, 7000 Stuttgart 1). Now in its 30th year, the Jazz volume shows every album now obtainable in Germany – including all the imports from the US and UK etc – giving you full track and personnel details, cross-referenced by artist and also by tune-title! There are, for instance, 16 different versions of Monk's "Bernsha Swing", one of the rare tunes recorded by both Cecil Taylor and Keith Jarrett (whose available appearances on disc run to 38 and 44 respectively). Get your retailer to get it, and he'll never be able to thrug off your enquiries again.

Current availability is not the point, so much as utter comprehensivity, in the hard-bound *Jazz Records 1942-1980* series (Jazz-media, DK-2400 Copenhagen NV). A couple of the earlier volumes were reviewed in *Wire* 67 and 97 by Richard Cook, but now Vol.6 (priced at DKr.279 and devoted entirely to Duke Ellington) sets new standards of completeness. A couple of my obscurer bootlegs go unmentioned, but these 615 pages include far more material than the equivalent section of the Bruyninx series of discographies. And, of course, the 1980

cutoff date is no problem in covering Ellington's career, which ended in 1974.

Best Rated CDs 1992 – *Jazz, Popular etc.* (Peri Press, Voorheesville, NY12186, \$19.95) is at the other, deliberately selective extreme. Ellington gets 32 listings – all with track details and key personnel – among this choice of 2,100 albums of blues, pop/rock, show-music and jazz (39.5% of the total contents) that were favourably reviewed in magazines, with (sometimes conflicting) quotations to prove it. The pre-selection element has its advantage (Jarrett has four entries, Cecil Taylor 13) but give undue influence to fashion, and to those magazines operating star-ratings, best-of-the-months and suchlike. Long before I tracked down any comments from *The Wire*, I had been puzzled by the inclusion of Chris Rea in the jazz section, and bemused by the repetition of half a page of Freddie Redd reviews (referring to "the tracks with Tina Brooks") under Rea's name. A couple of Chico Freeman write-ups get repeated on an adjacent page, too – proofreading, anyone?

You'll be interested to know that Chuck Berry, Michael Jackson, Billy Joel and Salif Keita each have three albums discussed; Sun Ra has 4, James Brown 5, Monk 6, Braxton and Wynton 7, Mingus and Rollins 8, and Miles 20. And I do seriously wonder whether the paperback binding will take much more usage. Finally, of course, if you want full and accurate references for all those *Wire* reviews – and features and interviews – you need a fifth book, namely the *Wire Index* (from Narnam House and now £8.95 incl. p&hp because you've missed the pre-publication offer). Need I say more?

## Schubert's Music for Piano Four-Hands

BY DALLAS WEEKLEY AND NANCY ARGENBRIGHT  
*Kalm & Averill, £15.95*

THE PIANO duet medium – four hands at one keyboard – may seem either too cosily domestic or to give rise to difficult problems of balance. This latter point is correct, especially regarding upright pianos, yet the problems are far from insoluble. One value of the four-handed format is that it enables keyboard players to become well

acquainted, via transcriptions, with the orchestral and chamber music repertoires, much of which have been published in duet form. But there are also many original duets, the finest of them written in Vienna by Mozart and above all Schubert.

Indeed, the latter, during his brief, fantastically productive life, produced more piano duets than any other great composer, and it is surprising that the above is the first book to be devoted to this part of his output. Only one piece, the Overture D.597, was performed publicly in Schubert's own day, but, as Arthur Hutchings is quoted in these pages as saying, the duets were written for his friends "rather than for awe-struck posterity". Yet it is essential to recognise that there is plenty to be awe-struck about in the so-called "Grand Duo" D.812, Fantasy in F minor D.940, "Lebensstürme" D.947 and several other pieces.

Weekley and Argenbright, a husband-and-wife duo team resident in Vienna, examine each work in detail and in chronological order with plenty of music examples and subsidiary illustrations. Their comments, into which biographical and other background information is incorporated, show excellent understanding of the music from the inside, clearly reflecting much performing experience. These are supported with a 36-page selection of writings on these works reprinted from earlier volumes by major Schubert scholars including Maurice Brown, Alfred Einstein, Arthur Hutchings and John Reed. Other appendices include a helpful bibliography, a listing of the present whereabouts of Schubert's surviving manuscripts, and a discography. To demonstrate true critical detachment, however, I must close by pointing out that this last inexcusably omits the exceptional recordings of this repertoire made by Christoph Eschenbach and Justus Franz which EMI issued during 1978-80.

MAX HARRISON





**California Cool:  
West Coast Cover Art**

EDITED BY GRAHAM MARSH AND  
GLYN CALLINGHAM  
Collins & Brown £16.99

THE CURRENTLY received image of the 1950s is a matter for no little mirth among those who were actually there, and have efficient memories. Oblivious of the contradiction implied by juxtaposing these two particular terms, propagandists dogmatise that virtually everyone then was both pitifully innocent and horrifyingly repressed. Much of the music was dreadful too, it seems, the worst of it being labelled 'West Coast Jazz'. With a capacity for repetition that puts minimalist composers to shame, the really authoritative writers on jazz have kept up a flow of horror stories about how "gutless and academic" this stuff was. A generation earlier their predecessors were insisting that boogie piano music was "all the same", and earlier still Ellington's bravest ventures, such as "Reminiscing in Tempo", were "not jazz". Providence benignly ensures that we always have a plentiful supply of clowns.

As a successor to *The Cover Art of Blue Note Records* the above 12" x 12" volume relocates on the shores of the Pacific to document the packaging of that same West Coast jazz. There is an informative Introduction by William Claxton, who, with others such as Roger Marshutz and Woody Woodward, did much of the photography and, along with people like Bob Guidi, designed many of

these sleeves. Next comes a presumably unavoidable piece by Leonard Feather, a much better one from Brian Case, and then we are turned loose among all those brilliant visual images. Their style and feeling as memorable as, yet of course entirely different from, the Blue Note material. The range here is, let us say, from the magnificent African mask on the cover of Curtis Amy and Dupree Bolton's *Katanga* to the equally magnificent lady on Cher Baker and Art Pepper's *Play-boys*.

Those who have long professed the West Coast Mystery will, even among such riches, note a few omissions. Why none of the Bud Shank-Laurindo Almeida collaborations? Where is Shorty Rogers and André Previn's *Collaboration*, with the coolest of felines poised at the



warne marsh

quartet  
music for growing



right-hand end of the upright piano?

And one or two contradictions might have been weeded out. For example, page five claims the

*Way Out West* cowboy sleeve

was Sonny Rollins's own idea while 104 says he was long embarrassed by it.

This visual feast is a luxury for me because I still have the great majority of these records (well, not the one reaming Groove Holmes with Les McCann ("You want me to record with him?") and have been listening to them ever since they first appeared. Those who have arrived more recently ought to use this volume as an appetiser, spurring them on to seek out the music it so vividly celebrates.



The clever Japanese have, after all, reissued everything on CD, some of it more than once and with completely different catalogue numbers each time.

MAX HARRISON

## INVISIBLE

★ ALI FARKA TOURÉ ★

## JUKE BOX

Every month we test a musician with a series of records which they're to comment on and mark out of five (five, Ali!) – with no prior knowledge of what it is they're hearing.

ALI FARKA Touré has often been called "The John Lee Hooker of Africa", but it might be more accurate to describe John Lee Hooker as "The Ali Farka Touré of America". Born to a noble (though not a *griot*) family in Mali, Touré creates music which may appear to have a strong blues feel, and play Western guitars, but he is firmly rooted in the traditional music of his country – melodies and rhythms which he believes are the origin not the product of American blues. His three-fingered picking style, first perfected on the traditional monochorde guitar, also owes nothing to Western tuning and chord progressions. Touré, 33 this year, has toured extensively in Europe, America and Japan, yet still lives in Niasfunke, a remote village in the Timbuktu region of Mali, where he cultivates cattle, rice, fruit and vegetables and is involved in irrigation projects. *The Source*, his third album for London-based label World Circuit, was released in June – a record he describes as his best "by a thousand times". The Invisible Jukebox was conducted in French; the interpreter was Julian Cox.

**Ali Farka Touré**  
was tested by Philip Watson.



GERT DE RUYTER

## BOUBACAR TRAORÉ

"Santa Mariya" from *Kar Kar* (Stern's Africa)

(Straight away, even before Traoré has begun singing) It's "Kar Kar" (Traoré's nickname). It's in keeping with the Malian musical tradition, but different from the music I play because it's from another region – Bambara. It's like the difference between English and Scottish music. It's very, very good. I like it a lot because it is original, truly African, music.

To Western ears at least, Boubacar Traoré's music has a strong blues feel to it. What does the word "blues" mean to you?

I don't really know the word blues, but what you're talking about comes from a traditional feel of original music which then influenced the music that became known as the blues. If you imagine a tree, then the blues is the branches of that tree; Malian music, not African music, and not even West African music, is the roots. American blues, to me, just means a mix of various African sounds. It's not American music, it's African music imported directly from Africa, and when I hear "the blues" I don't hear America, I hear Africa.

Marks out of five?

If the top mark is five, I give Kar Kar ten. He was one of the first African artists to use and adapt the Western guitar rather than playing a traditional instrument. I respect him for this; I'm very proud of him.

## JOHN LEE HOOKER

"Boogie Children" from *Blues Brothers* (Recordings 1948–51) (Ace)

Is it Lightnin' Hopkins? Or John Lee Hooker? I've listened to a quite a lot of his music, but I don't know this. Generally I don't listen to American music; I listen to French and Arabic music. The first time I heard John Lee Hooker was when a friend brought back a tape from Paris. I didn't actually think he was American. He sounded as if he came from Mali; the only difference was the language. As I was listening to him I picked up my traditional guitar and played exactly the same thing, and it was after that that I thought I should do more with my music because he was producing something second hand. I decided that I should show people where this music really came from. When I met John Lee for the first time, in Paris last year, I invited him to come to Mali to hear the origins of his music. As yet, he hasn't taken up the invitation, but I'd love to play

with him because he would learn a thing or two. He could learn the roots of his music. I'm not being big-headed about this, it's just the truth.

Marks?

Twenty. John Lee gave me the idea to take my music further. Think of it this way. I had the sugar, but he made me realise how sweet it was. And he is unique in his field because he is authentic, he hasn't moved too far away from the tradition.

**BAABA MAAL/MANSOUR SECK**  
"Lamtooto" from *Djam Ladi* (Rogue Records)

(Straightaway) Baaba Maal. (Do you know who the other guitarist is?) No, I don't. Even though Baaba Maal is from Senegal, this is not Fouta or Senegalese music, it's 100 per cent Malian. Everything he does is taken from Malian music – this is not his composition or invention. This song is a Malian song that everyone plays. All the same, I like him very much because he is the best Senegalese musician, even better than Youssou N'Dour.

In Africa, all musicians have a line or a style in which they play. They may sound different, but you can recognise that line regardless of what they are playing. Baaba Maal is like this. He may have studied music, been to college and become a professor and a master, but the root, the line, of his music is Malian. He has taken the sounds and melodies of Malian music and changed them, changed the language. But Baaba Maal is a noble musician, and when he goes into the Fouta region of his country he is an idol of the people, a leader. Ten marks. Baaba Maal is fantastic.

## BO DIDDLEY

"Bo Diddley" from *The Chess Masters* (Magnum Force).

I don't know this. I have never heard of Bo Diddley. But I liked it very much; I like the rhythm and the music even though I can't understand the words. I can tell you the origin of that rhythm (he plays along to the record, tapping out the beat on the table). It's a hunters' celebration dance, played on a Hari drum, which is used to welcome a chief or nobleman.

Marks?

Ten. He merits it.

**BILL FRISSELL**  
"Lookout For Hope" from *Lookout For Hope* (ECM)

I don't know who it is and I can't find anything of interest in it. Nothing. It's like the high music of the Soabonne; it has nothing to do with Africa, and there's nothing particularly African about it.

Does this mean that music must have an African ingredient in it for you to like it?

Music must have some significance to me. It must mean something to me. This doesn't. It was just sound – it didn't seem to come from anywhere or have a message. In Mali, music is always talking about something – history, legend, family, this animal, that tree, this river, those flowers. The American music I like – John Lee Hooker, Lightnin' Hopkins, Sam Cooke – says something to me even though I can't understand the words. Five.

## OUMOU SANGARÉ

"Diaraby Nene" from *Women of Wassoulou* (Stern's Africa).

(Straightaway) That's Oumou. She may sound very different to the way she sang at the beginning of her career, but her music is still typically, typically traditional. Her words and music are very significant and educative. She sings about life, and the good and bad in all of us, be we European or African. She says that everyone's future is not in their own hand, but in God's, and destiny's.

Marks?

Twenty, because for the Wassoulou people she's an idol and hero, and for that I hold her in very high esteem.

## JIMI HENDRIX

"Voodoo Child (Slight Return)" from *Electric Ladyland* (Polydor).

(Straightaway) Jimi Hendrix. Listen (he blows his cheeks out), he sounds like a toad (he makes toadish sounds to accompany Hendrix's wuh-wuh guitar). I like Hendrix very, very, very much, but this track is a little too strong, a little too heavy for me. He doesn't always move my heart, but I respect the fact that every guitarist in the whole world has tried to imitate him at some point. I have even met Africans who have tried to copy him – and they have made themselves ill doing so. They have tried to use his tricks (he makes a thinner, weaker sound). People have never been truly able to imitate Hendrix because it's God which gave him his unique talent.

Marks?

Thirty. The reason I'm giving more marks

*The elite and the street meet to the beat: from Constant Lambert to Sonic Youth, Keith Jarrett to Holger Czukay, Dave Brubeck to Augustus Pablo, Al Cohn to Zoot Sims*



*AMM inaugurate their very own (extreme) youth movement: (back row, l-r) Cornelius Cardew, Lou Gore, Eddie Prévost; in front Keith Rowe on perched violin and dodecabedrons. Pic: Frazer Wood.*

wire winner: coalescent torrent

AMM

*The Crypt* - 12th June 1968

Marchless MRC05 CD

ALMOST a quarter of a century after this live performance was recorded, the individual members of AMM still seem as awestruck by their creations as they (and their audience) were when they first appeared. Even as they continue to take part in their mediative live rituals, they can still cast spells, and still themselves remain enchanted.

Probing audiences, instruments and their own responses towards their sound exploration, the aim has always been to chart the unknown, or else the unknowable. It's a fixation which shows no sign of resolution, or seeking it. This thirst for new aural stimulation, combined with a rejection of witless repetition, had led AMM to this performance. As a historical document, this CD may have lost its initial shock value. But it has certainly lost none of its impact, and it remains their most obviously abrasive release. Back then they were just beginning the assault on the parameters of formal musical structure. Tracking down the noises of apparently random noises, they were - of course - blissfully unaware of their knock-on effect through the future of music. *Metal Machine Music*, industrial culture, *Borbeto-magus*, *Psychostandy* and *Sonic Youth* all follow in the wake of AMM.

Though *The Crypt*... features guitar, sax, strings, percussion and piano (a rare recording of an AMM with Cornelius Cardew), the players force their instruments to relinquish stereotypical emission in favour of a magical coalescence. Individual virtuosity is submerged in the group will, a collective sensibility and sensitivity. Individual glory sacrificed, for the greater good of AMM.

Differentiation is largely impossible on the opening track "Like A Cloud Hanging In The Sky": it starts as a piece of technological sound-detritus, slowing to be engulfed in a screaming, screaming, scraped and beaten torrent of noises and feedback, kept in motion by unpredictable, unstable rhythms.

Without a single comprehensible voice to focus attention, the listener's imagination is coaxed out to play. From mechanical animal chatter to electrical cable hum, "Neither Bill Nor Axe..." takes shape as an inhuman entity, even as it remains surprisingly cap-

able of touching emotions. The tension caused by familiar sounds being disfigured proves both unsettling and compelling. Evading intellectual rationality, AMM's music gleefully offers enquiry without obvious conclusion.

Improving on the original double vinyl box set, this twin CD presents for the first time the *Crypt* recordings in their entirety. Potential commercial suicide for a label like Marchless (who seem to feed off financial insecurity), its release mirrors AMM's own obsessive appetite for detail. Every second counts. Each sound unearthed is as important as the one that preceded it and the sound to come. AMM are truly lost in sound.

K. MARTIN

wire winner: English composition

CONSTANT LAMBERT

*Summer's Last Will and Testament*

Hyperion CDM6655 CD

LAMBERT was that sad figure, a man too variously gifted. Born in 1905, he was a fine composer, great conductor, brilliant writer and dazzling talker with many interests outside music who left too few scores and died of overwork, drink and undiagnosed diabetes in 1951. Long neglected yet clearly his masterpiece, *Summer's Last Will and Testament* (1932-5) sets for baritone solo, chorus and orchestra five pieces from Thomas Nashe's "pleasant comedy" of the same name probably first performed in 1592. Nashe was an associate of Marlowe, a contemporary and admirer of Shakespeare, and his writing combines poetry with satirical realism in a way characteristic of much Elizabethan drama. His *Unfortunate Traveller* seems to be the first picaresque English novel, and his play is a panorama of the plague which recurred in the London summers of the 1590s. He wrote, "Forsooth, because the Plague reigns in this latter end of Summer, Summer must come in sick."

Lambert takes Nashe at his word and portrays London with a heretically coloured brilliance that goes far beyond, and much deeper than, the blazancy and sweetness of his more famous *The Rio Grande*, the intensity itself hinting at the precariousness of life in a plague-ridden city. The score has many cover references to death, and at the climax of the Rondo *Burlesca*, for example, the orchestra blasts out the phrase set to the

words "Carry him off to the burying ground" in the old sea shanty "Walk Him Along, Johnny". In fact there are many ingenious modernisations of Elizabethan vocal, instrumental and dance idioms to which this music gives rise in response to the realism, poetry, laughter and tragedy of Nashe's verses. These tell of the plague's horrors and the music they inspired in Lambert centuries later equally does not spare us. With his compositional technique operating at maximum power and his imagination on fire, he brings to our ears and almost before our eyes the reality of the Elizabethan age in its splendour and squalor.

Lambert even had the courage to end with a slow movement. After the orchestral violence and almost garish colours of the Rondo *Burlesca*, subtitled "King Pest", comes the grim and very beautiful Sarabande, which



begins with the baritone singing, "Adieu, farewell, earth's bliss!" Also quoted is the phrase set to the words "They dance no sarabande" in *The Rio Grande*, which is also found on this disc, as is the "Aubade Héroïque" of 1942. This last expresses a different version of the elegiac nostalgia which, though at its most intense in the Nashe Sarabande, also informs other Lambert movements such as the Interim of his *Piano Concerto*. *The Rio Grande*, from 1927, was his most performed work and, even if Lambert resented this, knowing his best music was elsewhere, the strong jazz influence helps provide a memorable atmosphere. It is a setting of a highly evocative poem by Sacheverell Sitwell for chorus, orchestra and virtuoso pianist. The orchestra has no woodwind but five percussionists handling a wide range of instruments written for with an understanding and invention then rare. Jack

Gibbons's account of the keyboard part is the most idiomatic I have heard, and these performances in general, by the English Northern Philharmonia, Leeds Festival Chorus and others under David Lloyd-Jones, are acutely perceptive.

(If I refrain from identifying the three points at which "The Rio Grande" alludes to bars 188-9 of the Gretchen movements of Liszt's "Faust" Symphony it is only to show that we pedants are not always irrepressible.)

MAX HARRISON

wire winner: new jazz vocal

# CLAIRE MARTIN

## *The Wasting Game*

Los AKD 018 CD



It's no exaggeration to say that Claire Martin is the most phenomenal vocal talent yet to appear on the British jazz scene. This is her debut album. Only 24, her musicality is precocious and breathtakingly assured. Flexibility, control, swing, superb intonation, she has them all.

For *The Wasting Game* she has a sympathetic band featuring marvellous Jim Mullen on guitar and excellent Jonathon Gee on piano, and it's clear from her live performances that she really listens to what they're doing. Annie Somogyi and Clark Tracey complete the line-up here. The programme backs up Mark Murphy's assertion that "good songs are being written today. You just have to go out and find them". This is just what Ms Martin has done, and the result is varied and challenging. The title-track is an original by Martin and Gee, Joni Mitchell's "Be Cool", "Some Cats" by Leibler and Stoller are side-

by-side with "Everything Happens To Me" and Rodgers and Hart's "This Funny World".

It's Claire Martin's maturity that is so astonishing, her style cool and sometimes blasé in the way she throws off a lyric, her voice deep and husky. After such mid-Atlantic assurance it's a bit of a shock to hear the Cockney accent introducing the wonderfully witty "(All I Want Is) The Key To Your Ferrari": "There was one room in his house that he always kept locked, and that was his garage...". "Tight" invites comparison with the classic original version on *The Audience with Betty Carter* from 1979. It was risky to try and follow that, but Claire Martin's vocal twists and turns approach Betty Carter's.

Composer and non-singing (non-jazz) singer Richard Rodney Bennett, in his eulogising sleeve-note, suggests that nothing has been lost from live performances. But that's not quite right. In this year's Glasgow Jazz Festival, Claire supported Mr Tony Bennett, no less, who was very complimentary about her singing. (Just as well, since it was a marvellous set — in some contrast to what followed.) "The People That You Never Get To Love", a beautifully sharp Rupert Holmes song, seemed to pack more punch on that occasion than here. But there's plenty of time yet for *The Audience with Claire Martin*. If you're sceptical about my opening claim, start by checking out *The Wasting Game*.

ANDY HAMILTON

wire winner: biblical dub

# AUGUSTUS PABLO

## *King David's Melody*

Groundviews GRECD170 CD

TO STATE no more than the obvious about this inspirational music: it is a *novelty* offering. It is the lustrous parchment of Rastafari faith, but with the commandments and prohibitions and prophecies excised, subsumed into an unheard devotional murmur. It shimmers up from the gold-wash of its making like a desert mirage — like heat haze recalled, water over dry pebbles — as tangible as dunes, as vaporous as hope. If you let it, it begins to inhabit your life: consecrated dub housing, a space for prayer...

... or not. You can dig its beauty as an unbeliever, but it is a meditational offering,

and can only be further understood on that basis. Long before Afro-centric Rap tribes disinterred their lost-I.D. quest for the third eye, the Nubian beam, there was natty Mister Pablo, sitting by a river whose post-code may have been Jamaica but whose tributary was "East Of The River Nile" — that's where the music's head and heart were from, and facing back towards. A gathering of scattered tones, as if of tribes...

Like the Coltrane of Om-niscience, Pablo's is offered as a music whose (literal) vibration tunes into a supra-national and even (hear it out) cosmic wavelength. That it is so modestly melodic, plain, superficially even "pretty" does not lessen the real, felt meaning behind a phrase like "Roots Rockers". Pablo's cheap plastic melodica (ah, that old bricolage magic) may have been store-bought but was played as if by a modern trumpeter of Zion: Dub was in every sense the sound of walls (recording studio walls) rumbling down.

Reggae to those outside its system or programme may have seemed like addled gibberish (what belief system does not to non-adherents?), but it was just another slice of mindset metaprogramming: heavy dope, heavy dub, heavy politico-religious reasoning lift the mind onto a different plane of logic, away from the western Logos, away from music as profession and nearer to a common communal Purpose. The titles herein ("West Abyssinia", "Israel In Harmony", "Zion High", "Sufferers...", "Revelation...") sleeve and sleeve notes tell the illegible story: harps, hymns, icons of unholy suffering and utopian redemption. Just as "Haile Selassie is from the line of King David" so Augustus Pablo (so re-named, his destiny re-orientated) is a fluting phantom in the present, of "King David playing his harp".

The music stands, mighty still, to this day, a prime example of Rasta's weird, warped attack on technology. Murmurs of the Archais, moments of Silent elision shredded through technology, and technology immeasurably altered by the process. (The first techno pagan interface? Is it any wonder a lot of rave records are just dub speeded up?)

For the record, this is 11 "classic instrumentals, from between 1975-1982, none of which have ever appeared on an LP before." If you're looking back at reggae from now, with nothing in your collection and mighty *fearful* of the mad collector's maze then this is a fair enough place to start as any. If you're a mad collector, then you'll want to (double) check against your own Rockers and Messages 45s from that glorious time. And,

if like this collector, your 45s from that time are worn down to a dusty rut and sealed away for protection inside a time capsule, you'll want it anyway.

I've had a rather snuffy notion about reggae on CD until recently, and I'm still not convinced it all works on the format. But this represents the steadier less dub-warped side of Pablo – like a slowly unfolding frieze of musical hieroglyphs, a smooth funky gamelan – in which the formerly predominant lone quaver of the melodica is mixed around inside a more luxurious swathe of synthesised strings, xylophone (yes I!) and keyboards. As chill-out music goes, it sure has an enduring fire.

IAN PENMAN

## soundcheck

### BABES IN TOYLAND

Fontamelle

Scourthorn Records 18501 CD

KLEG

Zing

Boroscene BAR 505 CD CD

SONIC YOUTH

Dirty

Geffe CD

MINIMALISM ISN'T dead, its more bolshy advocates – who include the always vociferous, always quotable Glenn Branca – are insisting: *it isn't dead because it's hardly even started*. You can take that many ways: its more bolshy opponents are already gagging at the prospect of wall-to-wall John Adams, from now till the end of music.

How else – how better – might it continue? That depends on how seriously you still take Sonic Youth and what they've achieved; and – perhaps more pertinently – how willing you are to travel the length and breadth of the polymorphous underground or undergrounds they've helped birth, nurture, settle, spread, endure: the Sonic Nation. From sea to shining sea; from Lee Ranaldo-produced West Coast girlpunk Babes In Toyland to Lee Ranaldo-produced Belgian drone-guitar band Kleg.

Minimalism in rock means too many contradictory things anyway (from *Metal Machine Music* to Patti to The Ramones): the point is that Sonic Youth – Branca's children – let themselves become a conduit for the continuing aftershocks of every last one, at first one by one (at first they were bitterly unlistenable); at their best, all at once.

Still, they can put out a new record like *Dirty*, and it garners complaints that it's

merely *more of the same*, that they're not in some fashion *moving on*: the same *Daydream Nation* pop hooks rising out and sinking back into galloping electric density; the tension-and-release of microtonal scesaw drones, voices a rumble of whispers and shouts, no singing yet. To counter this feeling, you may have to hold on tight, to a notion of them as a channel, a central connection in a larger, evolving noise-organism. This is also the first time they've ever let any of their politics rise to the surface: let it go beyond merely unmistakable pulses and waves deep in the noise itself. Oblique image-rush throws up solid nuggets of stance ("I believe Anita Hill"); and of course they invite Iain McKaye – crotchhead American Punk's relentless, self-torturing public political conscience – to scribble unrehearsed guest-guitar over "Youth Against Fascism".

The beginnings, even, of rage. Is this *such* an unexpected way for minimalism to go?

Babes In Toyland are the unselected leaders of one manifestation of the Sonic Nation. Unwillingly defined as "foxcore" (Thurston Moore's useful-but-demeaning term for a significant, undimming wave of implacable girlmetal); ditto, though, by the word "feminist" (not because it's unfashionable any more, which it isn't; more because it's misleading, not fierce or abandoned or emotionally reckless enough – these girls know how much they have to lose if things shift back for good). Kat Bjelland's howling rage won't be quieted, deflected, bought off, smothered: but if you get beyond the initial assault, you hear this is a far from one-tone shriek of resistance. Babes have no time for mere pretenses; but they're developing a virtuoso's control over all the hard-to-face emotions. It's music grown up out of hard-core, once its own fairly limited kind of Or-minimalism, but the sawtooth guitar long ago stopped being merely shortest-distance-between-two-points functions, opened up into something rich, jagged and compelling.

Kleg, another happening frontier to the same territory, couldn't be more different, it's fast to say: an all-male septet (five guitars, bass, drums), dedicated to wordless, sound-as-sculpture chesh-study, all rising bell-like harmonic effects and seep-start cruising scapescape, work (as they acknowledge) in the wake of Branca, Rhys Chatham, the guitar-army composers. If the purpose here is sensuous intellection, inner rather than outer uprisings, it's still sweet coarse abstract noise as the best way to say no to

whatever it is in outside real-time grownup life we glumly accept and wish we didn't have to.

*Dirty*, though, comes from between two regions: lets them erupt constantly into one another, and bleed somehow out into the popsongs they're more and more willing to write. Sonic Nation: where Sun Ra speaks to Minor Threat, Derek Bailey to William Gibson, Public Enemy to Neil Young to Shonnes Knife to Living Colour to Borbetomagus to Madonna. A lot of sound going overground.

MARK SINKER

### DAVE BRUBECK

Live Featuring Paul Desmond

Real Gone Music 1538 CD

CRITICS in the 50s and 60s used to love berating Dave Brubeck. Little did they real-



ise when they were cooing into him for his excursions into polyrhythm and polytonality that it would come back at them many fold when Cecil Taylor (who acknowledges the early influence of Brubeck on his playing) finally set-up shop.

Brubeck occupies an anomalous position in jazz. Once considered the very epitome of the hip "modern jazz" by a large section of the public, his popularity in the 50s and 60s devoured his reputation. Today, confessing a liking for him is to condemn oneself to a lifetime of Hail Marys. Yet his style is unmistakable and his association with alto saxophonist Paul Desmond was one of the enduring relationships in jazz. Desmond, whose poetic lyricism is a joy to behold, always seemed stylistically at odds with Brubeck, whose jackhammer style advanced as inexorably as a Tiger tank.

But despite Brubeck's remorseless solo

style, he was an excellent accompanist. It meant that Desmond was always shown to optimum advantage and that today is the attraction of the Brubeck quartet. Seven tracks come from around 1954, about the period of the classic *Jazz At Oberlin* (Fantasy), and the recording quality is good. Desmond's sinewy logic is equally at home on the blues ("Shish Kebab"), as in such standards as "Lover, Come Back To Me" and "How High The Moon" – on the latter he almost reaches the heights of the *Oberlin* set.

The remaining four tracks come from the Newport Jazz Festival of 1959, recorded at exactly the period when the quartet were in the studios cutting *Time Out*, which would help make unusual signatures in jazz a commonplace. Two numbers get a work-out that would appear on that album, "Three To Get Ready" and "Blue Rondo A La Turk". They

Though this collection was put together by ace producer Michael Cuscuna with excellent documentation, it's often neither jazz nor truly an encounter, since Nat is sometimes just in a supporting role. The tracks with Jo Stafford are pretty much pop; those with Woody Herman are really novelty numbers. Ms Stafford's "Baby Won't You Please Come Home" is jazz though, and very good too, but the bulk of the latter is in the form of the Capitol International Jazzmen, a swing-to-bop group with arrangements by Benny Carter. Excellent solos here by Coleman Hawkins, Bill Coleman and Nat Cole – all the Coles, I guess (*Yes, because they forgot to invite Ornette – Ed.*) – are supplemented by Kay Starr's vocals on "If I Could Be With You" and "Stormy Weather". (Despite an attribution in the sleeve-note to Barney Bigard, it's clearly the fleet but vapour-clad of Buster Bailey on these sides, as the track-listing has it.)

Two witty sides with Nellie Lucher on which Nat also sings – "For You My Love" and "Can I Come In For A Second" – complete the line-up of female vocalists, and what names they are to conjure with. I guess now it's down to Dave Gelly and the Radio 2 audience to keep the memory of their singing alive. All were hit by rock 'n' roll – the familiar story. (Nellie Lucher went into real estate, according to the Penguin Encyclopedia of Pop Music.) What makes these singers "popular" rather than "jazz" is an interesting question; choice of material is a large part, because they fit well into the jazz contexts here. Nat Cole of course became too popular to be affected by the rock 'n' roll revolution, just about retrained his jazz roots, and had a great influence on the soul singers of the 60s.

ANDY HAMILTON



have an irresistible charm that makes you wonder how the critics found it so easy to dismiss Brubeck's quartet. His only true crime may turn out to be the fact he encouraged his sons to become jazz musicians.

STUART NICHOLSON

**NAT KING COLE**  
*Jazz Encounters*  
Capitol CDP 7 94693 2 CD

THESE ENCOUNTERS chart the period (late 40s and early 50s) when Nat Cole, peerless jazz pianist, was turning into Nat "King" Cole, velvet-voiced popular crooner. On the film version, where Nat played himself, a boorish white customer liked the bar pianist's occasional singing and the manager ordered him to make it a permanent feature. It didn't seem a pretty episode, but probably that wasn't the whole story.

**CONSPIRACY**  
*Intravenous*  
Marches MR21 CD

**CERTAIN ANTS**  
*I Had Always Intended To Explain*  
Self Music SELF7 MC

CONSPIRACY DO NOT sound like Albert Ayler, but they resurrect what made him shocking: melodrama. The sound of slasher blades shimmering in ferid heat (Adam Bohman's "prepared strings"), victim wails (John Teller's sax) and electro-nazies (Nick Coudry keyboards, Andy Hammond guitar). "Futled" has some fantastic textural contrasts

and popping guitar (I could do with more of Hammond's sardonic bop) and "Interstital" whorls a car-crash into the mix quite brilliantly. Conspiracy's lurid avantgarde is played with the saturated conviction of rock musicians – but there's no beat. Ratchets, butcher's knives, cybercarnivores snuffling in the cellar. Played loud it's actually frightening. A good sign.

In contrast to Conspiracy, Certain Ants present quick, impatient interactions, their demolitions playful rather than gothic – the sound of the carboot sale. C&W soundbytes, old toys, crying babies, a clash of rotting colours; Johnny's got a taygun, Mum; they're drilling up the street. The duos tend to close-focus fidget, but the 18 minute quartet "At 10 Cairns" is delicate and develops a seagull openness. Mike Jennings and Wire nemesis Chris Atton on guitars, John McMillan on considered nose, Martin Hacker on pipes and synth.

Both bands evince a desire to upset the administered world – unmarred by silly postures. People's reactions differ: this stuff exists to show that no one really knows the score. Give them a try. BEN WATSON

(Matches: 2 Shotlocks Cottages, Maribing Ty, CM17 OQR. Serf: 14 Logan Street, Dunbar, DH7 9YN.)

**ANDREW CYRILLE**  
**QUINTET**  
*My Friend Louis*  
DEW 858 CD

**RAPHÉ MALIK QUINTET**  
*21st Century Texts*  
EMPCD 45 CD

ANDREW CYRILLE has no need to 'prove' his avant garde credentials; he's made a perfectly enjoyable and accomplished post-bop session. Raphé Malik, another, if less renowned, Cecil Taylor sideman, chooses an apparently more demanding path; he's made a scouting free-jazz record. Both discs achieve their aims, but their qualities are likely to be assessed on matters of taste rather than absolutes.

Cyrille could probably play this kind of thing with a minimum of preparation and still make it sound polished: he's such a marvellous all-round master of the kit that he makes even simple timekeeping something to marvel at. His colouristic touches here may extend only to the difference between

his snare sound and his tom sound, but he points up everything he wants heard without drawing unnecessary attention. Oliver Lake and Hannibal Marvin Peterson share the front line, Steve Colson is on piano, Reggie Workman is as solid as the earth on bass: the writing is shared between them, with Lake turning in some further reflections on Eric Dolphy's "The Prophet". "The Shell", by Cyrille, is a wonderful piece, the melody coming out like a song, the improvisations crisp and clear-headed, and Andrew's punctilious solo a lesson in what a drummer can do. There's nothing untoward here, and if you want Lake and Peterson to cut loose, be warned that they never do, and don't seem too bothered about it.

Malik worked with Taylor in the 70s but has been absent (the sleeve notes detail the situation) for several years now. Tenorman Glenn Spearman is a favourite partner, and they're joined by Brian King Nelson on (of all things) C-melody sax. Some of this is murderously brutal stuff, "Talk" and "Companions Too" exploding into raw slugging; but there is a pleasingly-toned "T's Quiet Time", in dedication to Monk, and the

contrasts between Malik's buzzy but essentially clear playing and the snarling assaults of the two saxes create a different kind of light and shade. Drummer Dennis Warren, though he's imperfectly recorded, is the weak link: next to Cyrille's almost anachronistic elegance, he's a panel-beater, and he obscures rather than elevates the shouting of the horns. In its unabashed extremes, though, this is something of a rarity among modern records, even modern 'free' records. Both Malik and Cyrille are worth the price.

RICHARD COOK

**CZUKAY/WOBBLE/  
LIEBEZEIT**  
*Full Circle*

Virgin 253 866 CD/DVD 437 CD

PRESUMABLY RE-RELEASED TO tie in with the current return of Jah Wobble – the man with the unsaghtest purple silk suit in the history of avant-dub bass – this 6-track set features material originally released on EP in 81–2. The 80s were a generally and time for Wobble, whose new-found cosmopolitan

confidence on the *Rising Above Bottom* LP is heartening to behold. Czukay, on the last evidence, is still lost in the doldrums, but this sketchy selection shows him on rather more inspired form than when he teamed up with that inveterate aesthete David Sylvian. This doesn't go straight to the nerves the way the best Can stuff did – and Czukay on top solo form even more so – but with Can drummer Jaki Liebezzeit providing a flexible rhythm backbone to match Wobble's more dogged intent, it's an invigorating payoff.

Essentially, it's dub as played by an Englishman with stout reggae affiliations but without the inclination to be anything more than utterly steadfast with his lines, and two Germans who'd entered the rock arena by the back door and decided to view the whole business as an exercise in cultural forgery. "How Much are They?" opens proceedings with a suitably cryptic flourish, Czukay – credited with every instrument on the planet, not to mention "radio painting and rhythm boxing" – dropping in delicate piano ripples and that awful flautulent French horn he takes up whenever he fancies himself as a bit of a Dadaist.

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to be continued...

The two longer central tracks, numbered "R.P.S. Nos. 7 and 8" (Radio Pictures Series) are the most spacious, and the most Can-like, possibly because of their fluttering scraps of ghost guitar – presumably Cruikay, but remarkably close to Michael Karoli's old sound, unless it's Karoli sampled. There is a downside – Wobble singing at his more ciresomely blizzed ("is this real-ee, la la la") and the Elvis death-croak vocals on the not very atmospheric "Twilight World". But then, it's more a sketchbook than anything else, and as such, its pictures are all the better the more unfinished they look.

JONATHAN ROMNEY

## ECHO CITY

*The Sound of Music*

Source: Bizarre SBZ CD 008 CD



## WILL MENTER

*Cân y Graig: Slate Voices*

Resonance RECAS 100 MC

URBAN GEMELAN – to use the label coined by 23 Skidoo – was briefly a boom trade of the 80s (and I use the word "boom" adversely). Neubauten, SPK, Test Dept and others tapped a rich vein of associations and ideological fallout – the environmental implications of material recyclings, notions of reappropriation and conceptual recycling, and of course the possibilities of making a hell of a lot of noise cheaply. If that circuit failed to make any dent on the imagination of the mainstream (who remembers Big Pig now?), it was for different reasons – because the leading perpetrators moved onto other things, because there simply weren't that many tunes to be had in hitting things, because there was often just too much *Sturm*

and *Drang* rhetoric involved. And there was also the fact that the equipment was a nuisance to schlepp around – if you were going to steal, easier to steal a sampler and have the racket at your fingertips.

Clearly this kind of music had to find its place away from the expectations of the pop circuit, which was why Test Dept were thriving for the last ten years on conceptually precise projects that are closer to theatre, and why a group like Echo City equally work on site-specific projects like performance one-offs, bonfires and the recent LMC swimming-pool party. Echo City's members have mostly been involved in pop in the past (Van der Graaf Generator, Fad Gadget, Mekons), but this is a totally impersonal workshop venture that lets the objects do the talking (the Sound of Music, free of those troublesome musicians). Instruments include oil drums, batphones, as played in the sleeve photo by some very jolly Singapore nans, and baliphone, a wind instrument made of film canisters, plastic tubing and condoms – not all recycled, surely? As the name suggests, the group is big on atmospheric resonance, but also has a more flexible rhythmic approach than many in the field – swing campanology at one point, and a couple of tracks that do a *troupe l'entente* approximation of electronic disco throb. Only as elemental and New Age-y as you want it to be, it's interminably riveting, but most of the time quite scary.

Will Menter also specialises in site-specifics, but that he takes his site with him. *Cân y Graig* was a touring arts project celebrating Welsh slate and cultural mythology around it. Menter took his show, featuring slate marimbas called *lleibphonsi*, to venues including a cavern 400 feet underground and no doubt many arts centres that feel like caverns 400 feet underground. The music, to words by Welsh poet Gwyn Thomas, is a dense, joyous marimba-fest of lifting Reich-ism. Any reservations I have arise from Sioned Jones's voice, eloquent and sensual but for my taste a touch close to the ootound Sarah Jane Morris. There's also a faint touch of academic art centre ordinariness about it, but that's offset by Menter's perky soprano sax, Jones' swinging violin, and the surprising ease with which the ensemble turns funky towards the end. A rich seam is being mined here, but then you knew I'd say something like that. JONATHAN ROMNEY  
*The "Cân y Graig" cassette is available from Resonance Watercatch, Backwell, Bristol BS19 3EH. @ £7 (inc p&p)*

## 8 BOLD SOULS

*Sideshow*

Analogique Jazz AJ0103 CD

## MALACHI THOMPSON

*The Jaz Life*

Delmark DD-433 CD

FIVE YEARS after their glorious debut record, Edward Wilkerson's 8 Bold Souls have finally released *Sideshow*, a world of music unto itself. The entire hour-and-six-minute experience contains only five cuts, two of which run over 16 minutes, and much of the material's been evolving for the full five years. But long and sometimes hesitant to unfold as they may be, these aren't endless grooves or modal chaff. Quietly shifting, with bubbling bass-cello-tuba ground and brassy interjections, Wilkerson's compositions are true patchworks, musical quilts with vividly contrasting shapes, colours, themes and solos.

Especially solos. Compared with the through-composition of the group's first, this record lets the individual Souls speak their mind. That Wilkerson's solos are pillars of strength and intelligence comes as no news, he's one of the best tenor saxophonists in Chicago. But Mwana Bowden's baritone solo on the Souls' especially languid "Lonely Woman", and his exuberant clarinet spot on the title cut evidence mayor movement. Aaron Dodd's outstanding tuba chug-along follows a whispery cello solo from Naams Milkender during the ominously placid opening of "Black Herman", just before falling off into a super up-tempo tenor romp. Indeed, all the players are more sure-footed soloists now, and Wilkerson's writing and arranging has come into its own, owing less to Threadgill than it once did. In all aspects, this is an outstanding CD – hope it's sooner than a half-decade before we see the next one.

Fellow Chicagoan, trumpeter Malachi Thompson has also constructed a sturdy release, with a tight rhythm section of drummer Nasir Abouev, pianist Kirk Brown and Bold Souls' bassist Harrison Bankhead and a front line of himself, tenorist Carter Jefferson and also soprano player Joe Ford. Bravely beating blood cancer into remission, Thompson has worked his way back into form on the local windy city scene; check his chops on the voluptuous, bass-frenzied "Drown In My Own Tears", on Billy Harper's mildly Latin "Crockett Ballet" or on his own squared-off blues, "In Walked John".

No argument with the music on *The Jaz Life*; it's certainly tuff enough. Thompson's

presumptuous sleeve note – the most strident note on the disc – is something else, however. He distinguishes his music from "imitative, redundant and monotonous" jazz, which is "... nothing more than instrumental 'pop' music". (On a record with Rodgers and Hart's "My Romance" on it!) To signify this distinction, Thompson removes a "z" – hence, "jaz". With the relatively mainstream vector Thompson has plotted here, more or less forsaking the vanguard, he's hardly the radical exploratory original he makes himself out to be. In this case, it's probably more fitting to ask what happens when you take the "f" off of "freebop". You know, it comes awfully close to spelling "Marsalis".

JOHN CORRIETT

## JOE GALLIVAN

*Improvance*

Cadence Drum CJB 1051 CD

AMERICAN DRUMMER Joe Gallivan is no stranger to the London improvising scene, from which he draws the ten-member band featured on *Improvance*, a title which connotes both saivety (in playing such uncompromisingly non-commercial music in the first place) and purity (in choosing to play such uncompromisingly non-commercial music at all).

The four compositions are all by Gallivan, and provide a structured but unrestricted framework for improvisation. "Materialism" is the gentlest of the four; Neil Mercall's fluttering flute line is interrupted by Guy Barker's almost impatient entry, sparking in turn the first taste of the powerful ensemble voicings which are a feature of the music.

Evan Parker opens "Voices of Ancient Children" with a typically caustic, squalling soprano solo, and querulous, disruptive, demanding voices they prove to be. Guy Barker comes in on an implausibly high note which is only obviously played on trumpet when he falls into the descending phrase, and Paul Rutherford and Elton Dean also have their raucous say.

Rutherford's cogent contribution to the trombone feature "IMA" is a delight, and both he and Ashley Slater know how to leaven intention with humour to good effect. "Marcio's Maze" is a launching pad for bassman Marcio Mattos, joined by Elton Dean. The full ensemble (completed by trumpeters Claude Drippe, Gerard Presencer and Jim Dvorak) is used sparingly throughout, but generally to good, and occasionally to startling, effect.

KENNY MATHIESON

## LARS GULLIN

*Vol. 1 1955-6*

Dragon DRCD 224 CD

HAVING GOT TO Vol. 5 in its coverage of the great Swedish baritone saxophonist's 1950s output, Dragon has returned to the beginning and is reissuing its LPs as CDs with extra material. The above 73'45" CD repeats the contents of Vol. 1 with the addition of a Gullin quartet date of April 1956. His claim as the second European (after Django Reinhardt) to be a major figure in jazz is well substantiated by the individuality and ceaseless invention of his improvising on the four sessions here, perhaps above all on the new one, where he is the only horn.

He mainly is heard with Swedish musicians recorded in Sweden, of course, but at a Stuttgart concert he fits excellently into the quartet with which Chet Baker toured Europe in 1955. This included Dick Twardzik, an intriguing pianist who promised to be much more but who was only six days from his death in Paris. It should be noted, however, that another pianist, Rune Olveman on the 1956 quartet date, gives Twardzik a good run for his money. What became of Olveman? Without Gullin, Baker's lot play one of Bob Zieff's arresting compositions, absurdly (or ironically?) titled "Brush". What became of Zieff?

If I had to pick just one track to illustrate Gullin's powers it would be the unexpectedly bouncing "You Go To My Head", a piece that seemed always to set him going. His "Loverman" solo with Baker is particularly fine also – enough to compensate for the oddly tuneless scating by, of all people, Catalina Valente on "I'll Remember April". The three final octet tracks remind us that Gullin was almost as remarkable a composer and arranger as he was baritone saxophonist, but of that subject more on a later occasion. We must hope that the Dragon will send further volumes quickly.

MAX HARRISON

## CHARLIE HADEN /

*QUARTET WEST*

*Haunted Heart*

Verve/Gemini 513 078 2 CD

THE LATEST of Haden's moody movies-for-your-ears begins with a snatch of Adolph Deutsch's *Multer Falso*, tacked on to Max Steiner's fanfare for Warner Bros. Tacked on to three of the standard performances are transcriptions (straight from Haden's own

collection) of Billie Holiday singing "Deep Song", Jeri Southern singing "Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye", and Jo Stafford singing the rare "Haunted Heart".

It's a curious intertextual exercise. There's no doubting its evocative appeal, and the group sounds completely in period, but it's still – despite all critical rationalisation – difficult to reconcile with the Haden of the Liberation Music Orchestra. It may be that the appeal of a Spanish anarchist song is very much the same as that of "Moonlight Serenade", also included here, and it's possible to argue that Quartet West's "Dance of the Infidels" expresses greater ferocity than anything the LMO have done for some considerable time. Whatever the exact point of view, these are strong performances by a seasoned group. Marable is a wonderful drummer, spare and expressive, and Broadbent seems to



grow in stature with every record.

BRIAN MORTON

## COLEMAN HAWKINS

*Complete Recordings 1929-1941*

Affinity AFS1005-6 CD

TO MANY people, Hawkins seems a less compelling player – certainly a less romantic figure – than Lester Young. But, apart from his historical precedence, Hawkins always had a grandeur and a passion that went beyond mere stylistic considerations, and that stayed with him for nearly 30 years after the period covered here.

This is yet another compilation containing the classic "Body And Soul" (see *Wire* 100) but puts it in the context of everything he did before it, except for his work behind 1920s blues singers and his contributions to the voluminous output of Fletcher Hender-

son. (Which record company is going to attempt the complete Henderson reissue?) The middle half of the concertos detail his epoch-making half-decade in Europe and, because he tends to take a more central role than on sessions before (or after), they provide an extremely clear picture of his commanding presence and his definition of the basic tenor vocabulary, which left a strong mark even on such players as Coltrane and Ayler.

If he missed out on the rise of the Kansas City-inspired blues-riff approach during his European stay, he made up on his return with a most "untypical" solo on the Mennome All Stars "One O'Clock Jump", which was then adopted by the entire Basic sax-section for "Feedin' The Bean" (one of Hawk's two guest spots with the Count just after Lester lit out). An appropriate note to finish the entire set, this is also an unwell-

you were wondering).

This is obviously the album which, with its strings arranged by Johnny Mandel (whom we now have to call "ex-Natalie Cole" rather than "ex-Basic"), is designed to make Horn's status obvious to a wider public. There's a George-and-Ira, a Richard-and-Larry and three by Mandel ("A Time For Love" is his best-known here) as well as more *schmaltz* stuff, but the material does present problems for me. Not only "If You Love Me", written by (and only right for) Edith Piaf, but the title-track which is a straight steal from Aznavour's "Yesterday When I Was Young" plus a middle-eight lifted from Michel Legrand.

And talk about a midnight mood... if you listened to this in the wrong frame of mind, you'd certainly drop off, for hardly anything rises above the small's-pace that was impossible for singers pre-Carter (the film theme "Return To Paradise" is the exception, and features the only half-way heated slice of Horn piano). But, if you listen receptively, you can hear that her almost verbatim readings contain a wealth of subtlety, and her extraordinary voice (going more than an octave below middle-C at one point) can get painfully hypnotic after a while.

BRIAN PRIESTLEY



come reminder that, in the enlangued US of 1941, neither Hawkins nor Young recorded a single track under their own names.

BRIAN PRIESTLEY

#### SHIRLEY HORN

*Here's To Life*

Verve 314 511 879-2 CD

WITH SARAH gone and both Ells and now Carmen out of action for some while, the baton has rather suddenly passed to Shirley Horn and Abbey Lincoln. According to the textbook, it ought to be Betty Carter, but she is still seen as too individualistic by those who like their standards, whereas Horn and Lincoln stay just the "right side" of idiosyncrasy; oddly enough, all three are signed to the same label. (Cassandra Wilson, as well as being the wrong generation, hasn't even arrived in the standards league – just in case

#### KEITH JARRETT

*Shostakovich – 24 Preludes and Fugues*

ECM New Series ECM 1469 CD

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH's 24 *Preludes and Fugues*, Op. 87, were composed between October 1950 and March 1951, and stand as one of the great pinnacles of the solo piano repertoire. They present formidable problems to a pianist raised in the tradition to which they belong, far less to one whose major work has lain in jazz-based improvisation, and Keith Jarrett's renderings simply do not stand up to Tatiana Nikolayeva's magisterial Hyperion set, which are as near definitive as any are ever likely to be.

Jarrett is consistently less spiky, powerful, and emotionally attuned to the work than the Russian, lending further weight to the belief that non-Russian interpreters of Shostakovich tend to introduce a blandness and homogeneity which is no part of the original, even where it is beguiling. The American has a tendency to prettify the music (enhanced – or exacerbated – by a lovely recorded sound on the piano), aroning out the more barbed intricacies in the process.

Timings differ widely, too, but not entire-

ly consistently so; in the opening Fugue, Jarrett is much more languid and drawn-out, while in the 6th, he gets through both Prelude and Fugue in 1½ minutes less than Nikolayeva takes for just the Fugue; there are also dramatic variations in Nos 12, 16 and 22. In the main, Jarrett takes them faster, allowing him to accommodate the set on two discs rather than three, but unless you hang on Keith's every note, the extra investment in the Hyperion set is essential. It is Nikolayeva who gets to the heart of this wonderful music.

KENNY MATHIESON

#### JAZZ GROUP ARKHANGELSK

*Portrait*

Leo Records CD LR 180 CD

Portrait, Part One, starts *prego*, top end Tippett-like piano partly submerged in lots of splashy percussion, sax squealing and frenetic bass until it smooths out and practically melts away with the kind of fluency 20 years of regular collaboration brings.

Geography lesson: Jazz Group Arkhangelsk come from Arkhangelsk, on the northernmost coast of the old Soviet Union (about two centimetres from the top of Finland and a few more from the Arctic Circle in my atlas). But this is not some hapless Leningrad Cowboys outfit (as hilariously depicted in Kaurismäki's film) slaving away in the back of beyond – though, according to Leo Feigin, JGA have certainly entertained more than their fair share of drunken sailors and woodcutters. In Russia they have a large and loyal following, run a jazz club and a festival. In western Europe more people cotton on with each recording.

A seven-part improvisation within a structure by leader and saxophonist Vladimir Reizitsky, *Portrait* is further evidence of the quintet's search for and consummate handling of unusual timbres. Resonant buckers, amusement arcade electronics and an ethereal dialogue between melodica and Russian harmonica are among the most memorable. The CD closes with a waltz – the sensuous becomes dissonant. Wonderfully refreshing.

CHRIS BLACKFORD

#### J I HI KIM & JOSEPH CELLI

*No World (Trio) Improvisations*

DD Discs 4 CD

THE MOST interesting discovery (as far as British audiences were concerned) of this year's Company Week, Jin Hi Kim plays the

Korean komungo, sometimes electric, sometimes not. Her patient, severe playing lives out some of the clichés we may have created around such a musician – Eastern austerity, zen simplicity, one brushstroke is a lifetime's work, etc. Yet she can play with vehemence, even violence, and the komungo – which one plays by striking the strings with sticks – is no willowy chamber instrument. Its harsh jangle runs through these improvisations with a kind of cruel insistence.

An earlier CD (*No World Improvisations*, O O Discs 2) presented Kim and Celli as a duo, but here they invite each of five guests to participate in a trio improvisation. Two of them stand out, in my taste: the open "Triple AAA" with didgeridoo player Adam Plack, and "Baccalau Trio" with Alvin Curran on synth and samplers. The former is a beautifully sustained drone piece, flecked with Kim's inventive lines, and the other is a tightly-compressed phantasmagoria of sound, the sizzling electronic washes from Curran breaking against the bitten-off resonance of the electric komungo. I'm not sure about some of Celli's contributions: he plays various reed instruments (including, on the opening piece, a cor anglais without reeds) but sometimes sounds as if he gets mesmerised by some of the tones he gets and can't move on to the next idea.

Shelley Hirsch (voice), Mui Thiam (percussion) and Malcolm Goldstein (violin) are the other performers, and each work with the duo to varying degrees of success. But there is little that is less than absorbing. Jin Hi Kim has another record of duos with Elliott Sharp and Henry Kaiser (*Surgery*, Ear-Rational ECD 1014), but this fine duo seems to be the place to start.

RICHARD COOK

## JOE LOVANO

*From The Soul*

Blue Note CDP 7 98363 2 CD

THIS ALBUM would make an ideal introduction for anyone coming fresh to Lovano's music, encapsulating as it does the stylistic range and understanding which make him such a fully-rounded, versatile saxophonist. His greatest gift, though, is his ability to retain an individual voice across that range, from the rich sonority and discipline of the swing big bands through to Paul Morian's smash and scatteration.

*From The Soul* is less firmly rooted in bop than his previous Blue Note release, *Landmarks*, but gives greater emphasis to the freer aspects of his work in duo, trio and quartet

settings. The opening "Evolution" is something of a statement of intent in that regard, with its Ornette-ish horn lines initially cutting loose over Ed Blackwell's polyrhythmic drum patterns and Dave Holland's massive bass, before switching rails to a more Coltrane-like development of the tune, and then back again.

Lovano is no slavish disciple, though; when he plays Coltrane's "Central Park West", he does so on alto rather than tenor, neatly emblematic of his ability to transmute influences, rather than simply re-cycle them. The superb "Fort Worth" again evokes Ornette, even in the title, while "Lines & Spaces" is a little more reminiscent of his playing with Morian. A couple of standards (including a confident reading of that tenor trap, "Body and Soul") show off his full, muscular tone and delicate musical sensibility, while pianist Michel Petrucci is as sympathetic and inventive as the rhythm duo. An excellent, multi-faceted disc; it is highly recommended.

KENNY MATHIESON

sound and piledriving ostinato lead her into areas of genuine freedom, places where the attentive (if finally less adventurous Lindsey Horner (bass) and Reggie Nicholson (drums) follow as gamely as they can.

She's a generous player, flooding her tunes with notes and tones, but holding on to a certain clarity of touch: she can finger very fast, but it's the rolling textures one remembers, the big plain-spoken melodies and unfussy developments. As an energy player, she may invoke comparisons with Marilyn Crispell, an easy choice but a false one: they're quite unlike. The thoughtful ballad form of "Ancient Aits", introduced by fine arco bass, and the spinning gloria of "Shout" expose a writer as strong as the improviser.

Drum sound is a little boxy, but otherwise few reservations on a full-blooded and rewarding set.

MIKE FISH

## PAT METHENY

*Secret Story*

Geffen GED 2468 LP/MC/CD

## MYRA Melford

*Now & Now*

Enemy EMY 131-2 CD

MYRA Melford has had odd tracks on Knit-Fac projects and some self-produced tapes, but that work is wholly surpassed by this top-class record. As a pianist, she covers all the bases suggested by such disparate voices as McCoy Tyner, Don Pullen and Randy Weston, but before we get caught up in the name game, let it be said that this isn't a parade of influences. Her playing is consistently celebratory, which is why she reminds of Tyner's grand voicings, but her swells of

This is launched as Pat Metheny's first solo album, which presumably simply means without a regular group, since it features a larger supporting cast than any of his previous works. Despite the presence of a string orchestra, however, it is no great departure from the familiar melodic and harmonic material employed in the Pat Metheny Group, and exhibits all of their virtues and vices.

As always, the playing is excellent, and deceptively easy on the ear, especially from Metheny himself. His liquid, beautifully articulated guitar lines snake gracefully across the opulent, orchestrally-conceived

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backing tracks, a model of precision and lucidity on an instrument too often sacrificed to flash heroics.

The haunting "Above The Treecrofts" opens the album with a Cambodian song, an exotic strain which re-surfaces elsewhere in the music, but for the most part it features typically bright, major-chord harmonies and sentimental melodies, emphasised by swelling strings. "Facing West" would make a good television theme, while the film sound-track never seems far away.

"Antonia" breaks the mould with its more oblique, understated harmonies and melancholic voicings, but the concluding tracks revert to shushy romanticism. The *musica operanda* seems to have been that Metheny created all the music on guitar and synths (thus the solo tag), and then pulled in the

by someone sitting near me as a "warmed-over Gloria Estefan".

As the evidence shows, la Monte is very witty and very audacious. Last year's *Muir*, produced by Lindsay, saw Brazil's hottest young star mixing it with NY downtowners; on this debut set from 1988, she's with her own band, playing some chords live, and already going for broke with eclecticism. There's the aforementioned Miranda Lark, taken at a spicily humorous jaunt, a rather cursory stab at "Grapevine", Nash and Weill's "Speak Low", and a creditable emulation of Billie Holiday on "Bess You Is My Woman", with strong quartet Nouvelle Cuisine. But most of the set is straight homegrown material: "Preciso me Encontrar", a delicious ballad with acoustic guitar (actually I think it's a *castró* or one of those scaled-down exotic jobs), "Lenda das Serenas", a breezy samba march, and a skitish reggae number into which MM, forever the wag, tosses in a few bars of "My Heart Belongs To Daddy". As befits an ex-opera traneer, Monte has a range to reckon with – from sensual purring to a kind of tremulous snarl and, less felicitously, a raw-chick rasp that confirms suspicions (raised in the concert's one embarrassing moment) that she harbours aspirations to Cher-dom. But that shouldn't disqualify this set from getting the bouquets it deserves – fistfuls of Fyles, a side order of papayas, and pile those kumquats high.

JONATHAN ROMNEY



troops to flesh it out, and if little new ground is broken in the process, regular fans – especially of the electric stuff – will probably lap it up.

KENNY MATHIESON

## MARISA MONTE

MM

EMI 364 791761-2 CD

MARISA MONTE didn't wear Carmen Miranda's fruit-laden turban at the Royal Festival Hall recently, although she did show signs of having a campy enough sense of humour to carry it off. And she *did* do the song made famous by the greengrocer's dream date ("Ay ay ay... in South American way!"), not to mention mixing Bellini, the Osio Players and Sly Stone into one glittery barnstormer. All this and Arto Lindsay's pixilated guitar strangulation too. Not bad for someone who, halfway through the set, had been described

## ART PEPPER/ZOOT SIMS

Art/Zoot

West Wind 2071 CD

## ZOOT SIMS/AL COHN

Either Way

Endence ECD 22007-2 CD

SIMS AND Pepper both broke through in the later 1940s, Sims as one of the Four Brothers, Pepper with Stan Kenon, but their paths rarely crossed and they developed very differently, though compatibly. By the late stage at which this set was recorded, at a concert in California in 1981 Pepper had opted for modernist embellishments grafted seamlessly into a fluid bebop structure, whilst Sims had retreated into something that not only reflected his man man, Lester Young, but which could wander sideways at times, so that on his feature here, the rarely-heard "In The Middle Of A Kiss", he sounds at times almost like a tenor-playing Johnny

Hodges. Pepper does "Over The Rainbow", a party-piece he'd been associated with since he first recorded it with Shorty Rogers thirty years before (almost to the day). Maybe this was the last time he did it too: it's a superb performance and as good a requiem as any.

Ray Brown on bass, Vic Feldman – who takes a very elegant and witty solo on Denzil Best's old bop classic "Wee" – and drummer Billy Higgins make up the rest of the team.

Sims and Al Cohn is a more familiar combination. This disc is a reissue from 1961, quite early on in the history of Zoot-'n'-Al, but the format is set already: the tight but unobtrusive – almost invisible – Brothers-meets-Basie settings created by Cohn, the solos break no new ground but enliven by their subtle reworking of familiar forms. The novelty here lies in the introduction of singer Cecil "Kid Haffey" Collier on three of the tracks. He comes from somewhere between Fats Waller and Jimmy Rushing, doesn't threaten either of them really yet brings an extra feel of the spur of the moment to what might otherwise have felt like a too-carefully organised set.

JACK COOKE

## TITO PUENTE

Mambo Of The Times

Concord CCD 4499 CD

THIS IS Puente's 101st recording, says Bill Cosby in an otherwise jocularly uninformative liner note that defies all convention in the genre by actually raising a laugh. That's a lot of discs for the veteran vibes and percussion maestro to ponder new ways to blend jazz developments and the nightclub shuffle of old Havana, but unlike many of his rivals Puente has always stayed ahead with very sophisticated arranging and powerful jazz content through both the choice of material and the soloists. There are certainly some episodes here that might make you wilt a little – like the welcome-to-Tokyo twangs that are supposed to represent the far Eastern flavour of "Japan Mambo", and a vocal on the rattle track that would have been hard put to sound hip even in 1950 – but Puente's lazily apposite vibes on the Billy Strayhorn theme "Passion Flower" and Bobby Porcelli's ducking and diving alto solo on "If You Could See Me Now" make up for it. Any of this material would sound wonderful live, but on disc some of its baggage labels show.

JOHN FORDHAM

## LEON REDBONE

### *Up A Lazy River*

Private Music 262666 CD/MC

THE MAN whose craggy baritone warmed the nation's heart courtesy of Satchi and Satchi (remember those Inter City ads on the telly a couple of years back?) delivers forth his ninth album; again, a mixing of age old melodies and a smattering of originals harkening towards those same vintage forms, delivered with all the stylistic panache of the most exacting cultural historian and yet cut with an idiosyncratic touch that is Redbone's alone. The Reinhardt-style "Play Gypsy Play" which opens the collection marks his sole concession to European music history; otherwise he immerses himself in the great Stateside traditions, tracing a path through from Jelly Roll's turn-of-the-century ragtime inventions to the post-World War Two era of classic Crosby-style crooners – indeed the Hoagy Carmichael-penned title track is as close as Redbone's ever come to emulating Bing's velveteen delivery. Scampering Dixieland motifs, dramatic tangos, Music Hall, Delta Blues and all – Redbone infuses them with equal measures of reverence and humour. But the most inspiring facet of this collection is the degree by which he now re-appears the past. "Mr Jelly Roll Baker", originally aired on Redbone's second album "Double Time", gets a thorough reworking here, its bouncing bass sax and piano figure lending it a much harder, celebratory feel. Rather than simply getting inside the form, Redbone has the courage to play with that form. As comfortable and familiar as an old coat, "Up A Lazy River" is also one of the most dexterously embroidered of Redbone's recordings. Essential. DAVID ILLIC

## SLINT

### *Tweez*

Jeffrey Hammer 138 CD

### *Spiderland*

Touch & Go LP 64 LP

SLINT'S GUITARIST Brian McMahon and drummer Britt Walford (aka Shannon Doughton of The Breeders) were previously in Squirrel Bait, a grossly undervalued post-Husker Du melodic hardcore ensemble who, had they peaked now instead of seven years ago, would probably be a world force rather than a footnote. Instead they broke up, and went underground with their weird band in Louisville Kentucky, releasing two albums

about which most people could initially grasp very little except that they sounded nothing like Squirrel Bait.

It's not surprising these records confused people on first release (in '89 and '91 respectively). Their straightahead US noise credentials – the first was produced by Steve Albini, the second came out on the Touch And Go label – were a total red herring. The music is alarmingly introverted; like a slower, quieter, guitar-oriented Young Marble Giants with a depressive male singer. This is not an obvious recipe for a good time, but there is something going on here that is quite compelling and – even though Slint's records are being re-released and people like Pavement are hailing them as guiding lights for a new obliqueness – still, pleasingly, not quite fathomable.

Both albums need to be listened to at least four or five times before they even begin to make sense, but the first – more predominantly instrumental, with just snatches of studio chat, the sound of liquid passing down a throat, and some intense mumbling to break up the guitar angularity – is the most reluctant to give up its pleasures. Its more penetrable successor still demands that you push your head up right close to the speakers (or buy some headphones) if you want to find out what is being said and sung. But you do want to find out.

The way in which the band seem to have retreated into their surroundings – *Tweez*'s song-castles are taken from the first names of each of the band's parents, and the drummer's dog; and on the front of *Spiderland* the band's heads bob cheerfully, in black-and-white, in a neighbourhood lake – is oddly fascinating. BEN THOMPSON

## STRATA INSTITUTE

### *Transmigration*

DIW 850 CD

THE JAPANESE show a healthy interest in M-Base (its Roman letters pepper the Katakana sleeve). Originally the name for George Clinton's Funkadelic fan-club (see *One Nation Under A Groove*), the United Maggots Emergency Base has become the Macro Basic Array of Structured Extemporization. Steve Coleman and Greg Osby can conceptualize most jazzwriters off the side-walks.

Signed to RCA (Coleman) and Blue Note (Osby), Strata Institute has the young alfreans working with veteran tenor Von Freeman.

Acoustic bass (Kenny Davis) plays the clapped funk figures beloved of M-Base: no brash fusion virtuosity, though the tricky rhythmic mesh evidently requires chops galore.

To accommodate Von Freeman they stir in some blues and ballads: his greasy waywardness with pitch makes Coleman and Osby's on-the-dot precision sound a little tame. David Gilmore plays skillful, characterless guitar and on drums Marvin "Smitty" Smith boils away excitingly without ever really confronting the tight arrangements.

Coleman occasionally recalls the sense of higher maths that Bled and Monk deliver, but lacks their sense of instant risk. Grooving on-a-dime, tasteful to the max, Strata Institute combine neo-conservatism with ironed-out Prime Time. Impeccable, but very few lows or highs. Some people are



impressed (it's excellently produced). I got bored. BEN WATSON

## SUICIDE

### *Why Be Blue*

BacksOut OUT108 CD

FELS LIKE a decade and a half since the self-named debut album on Marty Thau's Red Star label of New York duo Martin Rev and Alan Vega established them in their notoriety. It is, With Rev's brutalist synth minimalism and Vega's reverberated vocals (and, in performance, ridgely confrontational stance), they made a signal contribution to the post-punk revivalism of electronic pop. There have been the occasional further albums on different labels, the inevitable splits, the variously indifferent or acceptable solo efforts – particularly from Vega, exploring his roots in primitive rock. Reunited

before Rev's console and keyboards, do Suicide set their synths on stun and rise to the challenge of Techno?

No. Which is hardly surprising, really. For all the impact of their early work, Suicide were firmly a garage rock'n'roll band. Now, with *The Cars*' Ric Ocasek producing, they're much more obviously a rock band. Ocasek provides an AOR depth of production value, the keyboards are richer and denser, the vocals upfront and, while characteristically guttural, explicitly in the rock tradition (shades of Iggy Pop, Lou Reed, Jim Morrison and, remarkably, at their most mannered—the FM friendly "Flashy Love"—Howard Devoto).

Essentially largely uptempo 12-bar riffs, underpinned by urgent electronic rhythms and laced with textural detail, the ten tracks have a strong physicality, as befits rock's

Some of the most impressive pieces are performed on the "inanga", a sort of 8-string zither which is so quiet that the singer has to perform in a snisper whisper. On other songs the seven-strong orchestra contributes rhythmically light backings of great intricacy. The construction of complex repetitive patterns from the most basic of building blocks is, of course, the aspect of this music which has made it so popular with minimally-inclined types, but here it reaches a fascinating richness of expression because of the inherent "impurities" of the individual performances. Two immensely effective pieces in this respect are the "akazehes", songs for two unaccompanied female voices which, although melodically straightforward and each under two minutes long, contain deliciously slinky variations within a basic call and response pattern.

Comes complete with full notes explaining the meaning and social significance of each song. Thus, for example, we learn that in one song, from the ceremonies of the secret "Kinanga" cult, the participants are begging for divine protection. Disconcertingly, the sung response is "Mmmmmmm . . ."

WILL MONTGOMERY



celebration of carnality, expounded by Vega's breathy, random couplets. We're talking sex, here. And sweat. From the pop urgency of the opening title track to the closing "Mujo", standstills are maintained. So, no challenging electro innovation but, quoting from that latter number, Suicide are still "staying cool to the beat". Commat.

RICHARD BOON

# TAMBOURS DU BURUNDI

*Batimo. Musiques et Chants*

Playa Sound PS-63089 CD

A compilation of different Burundi styles: as well as the well-travelled drum band there are a variety of ensembles including the national orchestra, male and female choirs and solo and duo performers.

# JEAN TOUSSAINT

*What Goes Around*

World Circuit WO29 CD

JEAN TOUSSAINT discovered the British jazz revival in the early 80s when he visited London with the Jazz Messengers: in 1986 he settled here. As a Berklee student, he found the self-taught methodology of the black musicians refreshingly creative and adventurous.

This is his debut album, a different set of musicians on each track (Jason Rebello, Julian Joseph and Bheki Mseleku, just to list the pianists). A pity, because to these ears the rhythm section of Wayne Batchelor (bass) and Clifford Jarvis (drums) is incomparably superior ("Poo's Shuffle"). Wayne Batchelor has a steady, bluesy kick reminiscent of George Duvivier—it's a treat. Mark Mondesir is impressive in a post-Cobham, fusion manner, but such churning stickwork doesn't seem to surprise the soloists. Technically assured, Toussaint is in need of the kind of shocks Art Blakey used to deliver.

"Autumn Leaves", just Tony Remy's guitar and Toussaint's tenor, is refreshing because it's playful and camp. Despite Toussaint's enthusiasm for the freshness of the London scene there's a danger of monotony in

this polished bop. This is a scene which is fun to witness live, but it seems to lack ambition, and its recordings can still be wiped from history by a Prestige session from the 50s.

BEN WATSON

# UBIK

*Just Add People*

Zooz 1 CD/MP3MC

IN the likelihood of most readers having mislaid their copies of *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* (26, 1957, pp 527 ff), I'd like to take this opportunity to remind you all of Bernabeau's exciting article, *Science Fiction*, therein. Although the learned doctor was writing before MIDI, Moogs and MDMA became commonplace, it strikes me that his little monograph has much to say about the anxieties of future shock (alienation, depersonalisation and the like) that underpin not only sci-fi, but modern techno music, too.

Ubik (sleeve notes: "Now is the time for the machines to speak") are a North London duo who have achieved a measured success in the field of Techno/dance music. After five singles, released into a seemingly insatiable market, they have released their debut album, *Just Add People*. Sixteen CD tracks (five less on the LP) compromised by their imperfect recall of Kubrick, Anderson (Laurel), YMO, Kraftwerk, half of Chicago and most of Detroit, while the spirit of the Godfather of Soullessness himself, Gary Numan, hangs over campy titles like "Command You To Lie", "Float Beyond Desire", "Transcendental Devotion, Let Go".

That's a less than critical observation, but then Techno's mythology has never been at issue, and neither, until now, has the pathology of its operatives. Communicating through sleeve notes, Ubik are already thinking neuroscally. "[...] data processing, retrieval and control have accelerated beyond all expectation. In the space it takes for an idea to become reality, it's already out or date". And tellingly: "Computers make music, we are the operators, but the outcome is beyond our control". Now Bernabeau: "Companion of these [science fiction] myths indicates that the dazzling speed of technological innovation . . . has psychological effects to which the rapidly increasing vogue of science fiction may give tentative clues. . . . the fantasies of science are a vehicle for expression of far greater anxieties and more deeply regressive defenses than those . . . of other times".

And so, not just Ubik, but the rest of

them: 808 State, Altern-8, Fortran-5 et al. Depersonalised cyborg wannabes trying to be robopops. Perhaps, by virtue of anxiety alone, Ubik are more human than the techno genre would like to admit. In which case – straight talking – Ubik are capable of better stuff. *Just Add People* does not contain a single break that could not have been written five years ago. There's no structural development, no rhythmical development, no harmonic (as if) development: this is a well-constructed stasis, an imaginatively impoverished soundscape controlled by machines. And if (just pretend) machines could weep, then they'd be howling over this one and the state of techno.

LOUISE GRAY

# RENE URTREGER

Jazzman

Cartier CARCICD CD

ELEGANT UNACCOMPANIED piano album from the 58-year-old French pianist who performed the Stan Tracey role in France through the 50s and 60s, working with every touring celebrity in the business, including Miles, Chet Baker and Sonny Stitt. Urtreger developed his style in the late 40s when the world was waking up to bop, and in his mixture of sax-like right-hand lines and bursts of rich two-handed playing he resembles Bud Powell, who he's supposed to have evolved in parallel with rather than pursuit of. Most of the themes here are Urtreger's own – graceful waltzes like "Valsajane", poignant ballads, tributes to Monk and Bud. There are also complex, multi-level accounts of JJ Johnson's "Lament" and Monk's "Round Midnight". But though it's a lovingly and expertly crafted set, the evenness of the rather pensive tempos, the private labyrinths of the themes and the uniform improvising method would only make it essential for what must be a handful of Urtreger buffs in this country.

JOHN FORDHAM

# VARIOUS ARTISTS

Artificial Intelligence

Warp LP6/MC6/CD6

BIOSPHERE

Microgravity

Apelle AMBCD 3921 CD

THE ORB

U.F. Orb

Big Life BLBCD 18 CD

If music has rarely sounded surprising in itself during the last few years, the context of

weird collaborations, experiments and boundary transgressions has often shifted the relatively ordinary into realms of otherness.

Electronic music has always been executed by comatose knob twiddlers and sociopathic plug and socket boffins who believe intelligence is measurable by one's ability to remake *The Planets Suite* with a square wave. Hence music's sociability has tossed a sort of pragmatic magic powder into this arena. Arts centre investigations into impossible software have been swept aside by daffy New Age metaprogramming and the desire to climb aboard a happening record label that sells.

So what is it, this new ambient, intelligent techno, dub underground thing that seeps out of the mood machines and into the charts? Sheffield's Warp label calls it Electronic Listening Music, Belgium's Apollo (a subsidiary of R&S) describes it as "the energy of high-tech dance music with the ambience of computer sounds," while market leaders The Orb are stressing the "fun" factor.

Most people who make electronic music eventually become computer nerds and start releasing tracks with single word, sci-fi titles like "Meltdown" and "Download". All of the above albums are proof that Tomita, Prince Far I, Gary Numan and The Jonzun Crew are shaking hands and sharing some Dutch Skunk somewhere in the cybernet, yet the results are curiously, if intermittently satisfying.

Speedy J's "De-Orbie", one of the tracks on the Warp compilation, is typical in its relish of dystopian drones, squealing rhythms and angelic choirs. It's no insult to say that this is Joe Meek and "Telstar" all grown up, because the sounds are mercurial enough to advance the form beyond spiritualist farground music into pure kinetic muzak.

Of course, the idea of Modern-ish African-American hermit visionaries producing this black dystopian cybersoundtrack in Detroit, Miami and Chicago was fascinating, if only because cyberpunk was so myopically whitebread and rock 'n' roll. The transnational Europeans and Scandinavians should not be dismissed, however. Geir Jenssen's *Microgravity* is very Eno – cheeky enough to sample a fragment of Jon Hassell, rich and subtle enough to float around some familiar deep trenches and inner spaces in mesmeric solemnity.

For The Orb, the prospect of floating in hyperreality seems to be a bit of a laugh. This is a more robust vision of the dub

encounter: enough bass undertow to blow your wig off and a wide streak of Goonish absurdism peeking out from behind the computer cumulus, at times dispersed enough to flow off into regions of fragmentation which undermine the solid, comforting aural core that this developing genre is so reluctant to abandon.

DAVID TOOP

# VARIOUS ARTISTS

The Saxophone Phenomenon

Star 401 CD

THERE is a light that never goes out, and it burns in the bell of a saxophone. George Haslam's inventive and courageous compilation of modern sax in GB '92 is a convincing essay on the enduring capacity of the old twist of metal to say new things. These are



mostly old campaigners at work – Haslam himself, Elton Dean, Paul Dunnall, Evan Parker, Chris Biscoe (on alto clarinet, but never mind), Lol Coxhill, and the relative upstart Alan Wilkinson – and while it won't be intended as an Old Farts Strike Back symposium, there's an amusing note of greybeard upsurge in this packed (almost 80 minutes) CD.

Saxes are plastic enough to slip into most improvising environments, although I'm not sure if the "dominant" role which the sleeve-note speaks of would have other instrumentalists in agreement. It's the musculature of sax timbre which dominates this record, played on soprano, baritone, C melody, alto and alto clarinet here. Sax is still a much matter and it would have been interesting to have offered a more explicitly feminine viewpoint to this phenomenon. Still, on musical reward, these nine pieces

score highly.

Especially valuable to be reminded of Lol Coxhill's solo soprano, now far less often heard on record than in the 70s and 80s; the Dean-Rodgers-Sanders trio, a compelling argument for a "pure" free-jazz survival; and the astounding Wilkinson-Fell-Hession trio, which is surely surpassing even the Brötzmann/Van Hove/Bennink group for raw power and ideas. Evan Parker's brief solo is as fine a piece of eloquence as he has given us lately and Haslam's own two contributions trace George's scholarly and assiduous kind of post-free playing to vivid effect. It's also a tribute to some of the unsung music venues that still support this club: Holywell Music Room, The Red Rose Club, Jackson's Lane, Leeds's The Room and Evan Parker's Kitchen.

MIKE FISH



# **DIE WARZAU**

*Bog Electric Metal Bass Force*

Fiction 511 588-4 CD

# **MINISTRY**

*Psalm 69: How To Succeed And How To Suck Eggs*

Sire 7599-26727-2 CD

# **SKREW**

*Burning In Water, Drowning In Flame*

Devotion CDDVN 13 CD

# **THOUGHT INDUSTRY**

*Music For Intacts*

Metal Blade cdzoro 45 CD

THE AGE of cyber-metal is upon us. Chuck Eddy warned in his book *Stairway To Hell* that industrial disco with metal rivers was the coming thing, and we should have listened to him. The edifice has been (some might say mercifully) slow in the construction, but it's definitely taking shape now,

and its foundations are in Chicago. Those hard at work on it don't seem to have too much of a problem with the paying-as-much-respect-to-William-Gibson-the-author-as-to-Orville-H.-Gibson-the-guitar-maker bit, but a lot of them seem to have trouble taking the disco part seriously. Die Warzau do their best to put this right by putting the BMP statistics (112-131) after the song-titles and getting Mike Rogers of Dece-lie semi-fame to help with the mixing. The results are, well, mixed. The single "Fankopolis" is something of a toe-tapper but much of the rest steers perilously close to the little-leamed early 80s college-educated tribal funk essays of Shriekback et al. There is also a worrying streak of incipient humanism that will not go down well with their peer group.

Speaking of which: Ministry — undisputed heavyweight champions of this sort of thing — have finally got round to finishing a new record. Currently leading lights of Lollapalooza 2, their status in itself is a problem: "I don't see this music being accepted on a national level," insists leading light Al Jourgensen, somewhat disingenuously, "if it does happen, it'll be disappointing — it means it's not threatening enough people." Whether or not they are threatening enough people, Ministry's attack is certainly impressive. Anyone who's not heard them before will be surprised by how purely metallic they sound — trash bands have been making sounds of this intensity for ages without getting much credit. When you build a sound this monolithic, it's the breaks in it that people are going to find interesting; the moments when the voices stop sounding like they were recorded underwater. "TV IF," with its sudden, clear howl of "Tell me something I don't know," and the jaunty Techno-psychobilly of "Jesus Built My Hot-Rod", complete with Captain Beefheart-style improvised lunacy from the septic mouth of Burtchhole Surfer Gibby Haynes, are definite highlights.

Before they came under Ministry's influence, Austin-based Skrew used to be hardcore band Angkor Wat. "Hardcore was very cool at the time we were doing it," explains gawler/axeman Adam Grossman, "but I've grown." The birth of Skrew is a clear sign of the potential for a new and frightening massed bands proliferation, in the manner of that sparked a few years before by Minor Threat and Black Flag. "It's not just about power chords; that doesn't work any more," Grossman continues. "I came to the realisation that I had to work with machinery." His

record takes its title from a Charles Bukowski short story, and exhibits a matching fondness for directionless brutality. This man works in a Methadone clinic counselling junkies . . . and he does this on his nights off?

The surprise package of these four acts are the heroically verbose Thought Industry, all the way from Kalamazoo Michigan. Dali's "Soft Construction With Boiled Beans: Premonition of Civil War" adorns the cover, and that title stands as a landmark of pith in an unforgettable lyric sheet, which is punctuated with relevant quotes from Byron and Sir Phillip Sydney. Romantic, Metaphysical Cyber-Metal — that way lies the future. One minute "Lax russet lips lavish scabrous empathy", and the next "Mothers womb stops dancing round pyres of fusion hymnals" (memo to Jazz Cafe management), or something like that. Maximum respect is due to one Paul Oberlin, who not only wrote this stuff, but actually manages to sing it with a fair degree of conviction. "Colonize. Rectify. Apologize," sounds like a fine motto for the 21st century, and the music — jauntily folked-up ProgSludge — is pretty good too. Like the man says: "I am vomit. I am pus. I am forever. Mum shall dance a final ballet."

BEN THOMPSON

# **TREVOR WATTS MOIRE MUSIC**

*Drum Orchestra Live*

ARC/Cas014

*Unexpected Pleasures*

ARC/Cas015

CONSIDERING the wave of hi-tech almost-jazz that slides past and barely ignites a brain cell, it's a reprieve to majors and independents both that they haven't apparently noticed Trevor Watts' Moire Music. These two cassette are available on mail order and through some specialists but their content isn't just "interesting" left-field audio research — it's open and exuberant collective improvising, blending townships music, Latin music, Middle Eastern timbres, freebop, and all over a beat that could set a nightclub jumping. *Unexpected Pleasures* contains the earlier takes, from 1982 (featuring the first and most multi-voiced versions of Moire Music, including four saxes and vocals) and 1986, while the *Live* tape is from the 1989 Arts Council tour and is confined to a three-piece drum "choir" plus violin, bass and Watts on horns.

*Unexpected Pleasures* is exactly that, and the

most varied and open music. There's more variation in the writing, like the wriggly sax riffs behind Pinia Saut's voice on the 1986 "Celebration for Paul" and the dense, surging contrapuntal music at the climax, but the early material is wonderful (if you forget about the bathroom-like recording quality), with swooning Ellingtonian horns against baleful, thumping bass and percussion riffs, violin episodes that sound like Hungarian café performers scrambling into a Cape Town jazz club, and a title track worthy of Ornette himself in its joyous, song-like sway. *Live* is more ascetic, with Watts' eloquent saxophone lines (less jazzy and more North African in timbre by this time) having a lot more to do, sometimes typically fresh and agile linearity, sometimes sustained bitter-sweet soprano trills against Peter Knight's violin. It's maybe more percussively rich, but "Unexpected Pleasures", rough and ready though it is by comparison, is sensational.

JOHN FORDHAM

Available from ARC Music & Records, 20 Collier Road, Hastings, E. Sussex TN34 3JR

## CASSANDRA WILSON

*Dance To The Drums Again*

DIW-863 CD

It's EASY to be seduced – or repelled – by the trappings of M-Base into seeing Wilson as either more original than she is or less relevant to the main flow of jazz singing. But within the crunching beat and synthesized elaboration of this set the prophetic emerges as a creature with some refreshingly earthly antecedents.

Most obviously, in the use of her lower register, the elaborate distortions and the sheer power, it's possible to hear echoes of Nina Simone. But when Wilson sits at the piano to do "Amazing Grace" one hears less Simone than Sister Rosetta Tharpe. There are also traces of Abbey Lincoln in Wilson's voice, and some of the lyrics – increasingly street-orientated and more passionate perhaps than in the Steve Coleman days – recall Lincoln in her heyday with Max Roach, though there's still sometimes a quire guileless Pam Ayres-ish touch about them too. It's possible also to hear a little of Oscar Brown Jr. on some of the songs, and whilst the thunderous rhythms here might be a world away from Brown's implied finger-clicking they're nevertheless parallel worlds.

None of this, to my mind, detracts from Wilson as a singer or stylist, nor does it

lessen any claim to originality she might make. Indeed, the way in which a strong tradition is re-articulated by entirely novel means – possibly even unsuspectingly – rather better sustains any call the singer makes on the listener's attention.

JACK COOKE

## YELLOW MAGIC ORCHESTRA

*Technodelic*

Restless Records CD LS 9153 2 CD

*Naughty Boys*

Restless Records CD LS 9152 2 CD

*Service*

Restless Records CD LS 9151 2 CD

YOU LISTEN and you listen, and YMO's affiliation to anything within the fuzzy terrain that Techno now delimits becomes less and less apparent. What was a given – YMO are one of the Godfathers of Techno – flaps into a question: how were YMO ever taken to be the Godfathers of anything? Surely no-one, before or since, has made a music as remotely idiosyncratic as this. These three final LPs, recorded between 1982 and 1983, come from a time before the ceaseless wars of demarcation which have changed the various poles of magnetic attraction by 1992. Hardcore Techno v Garage, Ambient Dub v Ragga-Techno, Italian House v Playground Techno, YMO offer no assistance to any sides, no solutions – by way of roots – to the evolution of any of these intimate enemies. Their loves embrace sounds which no-one has time for anymore, polymorphous passions which combine styles best kept apart. "Seoul Music", from 1981's *Technodelic*, for instance, has a Buggles voice unrelenting itself in and out of Takahashi's MacCartneyesque harmonies, his mannered drawl recalls not only Sylvian and Ferry but also, more alarmingly, Jeff Lynne from ELO – these associations assert themselves whenever Takahashi sings in English. Maybe they're protective mechanisms, to shield us from the implications of YMO's incursions into embarrassments we thought our OWN. By the final album, 1983's *Service*, Takahashi was parodying/paying homage to Clintonesque funk. "Lumbo" sees him adopting such iconic phrases as Cold Sweat, Get on the Good Foot!, and Take it to the Bridge! – as abstract, almost meaningless terms.

In the background, Sakamoto's keyboards and Hosono's bass pop and surge, a shrewd fizz industrial line mazak. YMO knew all pop music so well that after a while you feel

yourself drawn back unwillingly to a time of overabundant wit, poise, control, artifice; some late 70s nexus of smart-alec global romanticism, a move so attractive to clever dicks like Bill Nelson, XTC, David Sylvian, 10CC. All these musicians were in there, empathising with the urbanity of YMO's wild ambition: Calypso piano, synth drums, pastel surges, classical passages, nothing escaped them. The winsome ballads sung in Japanese such as "Kai-Koh" – which dot the *Naughty Boys* album – provide relief from YMO's closeness, from the oppressive sense that their music brings back all the values you tried so hard to escape from, that you defied yourself against. On *Service*, every second track was called "S.E.T." – some of them were film rakes, others included adverts, a play head from the wings, an



explosion. In their virtual-image effect, these haven't dated at all. They are just as "clever" as the rest of YMO's work but, detached from verbal understanding, they offer the familiar relief of strangeness, of YMO back in their place and you back in yours. The forthcoming remix LP should fix this distance and stop any further encroachments. These days, after all, every record is the beginning of its own Infinite Remix. There's no reason at all why YMO should not sound more like LFO – if and when we want them to.

KODWO ESHUN

## outlines

Mark Sinker opens a boxful of Elvis Presley's 50s recordings.

PERHAPS THE most unexpected

thing about RCA/BMG's Presley-project is how unexpected so much of it is. This box release of his 50s recordings, 140 cuts, in order, rockers, ballads, gospel songs, novelty, several hitherto unreleased airshots, everything, and all back in order: from the primeval acetate he made for his mother's birthday in 1953 (or whatever: see *Great Last Recordings*, p.38) to the press conference he gives as a GI in 1960. RCA is at last doing proud the product-iron that's kept them wealthy through the thinnest times, bringing it out with a handsome little booklet by Peter Guralnick, passionate historiographer of Sun, Stax, and the rest of the courageous, money-mad little rural indies that turned American music inside out. And of course it's magnificent. It's also a pretty tricky artefact.

The main, far-too-famous story hardly needs to be told again, the relentless golden moments, the same as when you last heard them. The original Sun Session songs, from "That's Alright (Mama)" to "Mystery Train", coaxed by wise prophet Sam Phillips out of a teenager polite to the point of autism, all then, ghostly grace and fleet movement. Then, after Col. Parker convinced RCA to pay more than anyone can quite believe, the chart-shots that were heard round the world: "Hound Dog", still the same titanic parody goof-off, "All Shook Up", still the same nervy, essay soliloquy, "Heartbreak Hotel", still sort of missing the point (when they first heard it, writes Guralnick, RCA panicked – they thought they'd signed up the wrong Hillbilly Cat).

What matters here is how much the story seems altered when all the rest of the does are joined. It may be that almost every studio moment here has appeared somewhere before – but set against all the careless elisions and crazy-paving bio-remixes of RCA's notorious anything-goes compilation policy over the years, there are countless surprises that only the most diligent students can have really been acquainted with up till now. The history turns out all the stranger for being this much more complete.

For example, there's as much sly wit as there is straightforward unthinking energy: there are whole songs where his delight in working on the daft material he's picked (tackling the conventional suppy downpour of "Young And Beautiful" for the film *Jailhouse Rock*, he pushes exact pronunciation and overripe delivery to some kind of crazed world-record limit) erupts inevitably into parody, of his idols, of himself. But still his

gospel belief ("There'll Be) Peace In The Valley") stays true, tugging even at the stoniest of committed unbelievers. In between there are reaches that still seem very strange, some famous ("I'm itching like a man in a fuzzy tree," from "All Shook Up"), some not ("You did what you did to make me love you/you really opened up my mind," from an unexpurgated Sun Studio version of "When It Rains, It Really Pours" not released till the mid-80s – although actually the RCA version let in 1965 only translates this debauched image into a deranged Scotty Moore guitar solo).

Above and beyond all, there's a young man lost in the face of his new-found power and – some thing – the hilarious, unbuttoned sensuality of voice and body. He's one of a kind, not an ad-man's generic creation: never let anyone tell you he was simply copying others who went before.

Listen to their work now, and his peers – Jerry Lee Lewis, Chuck Berry, Little Richard – still exhibit their oddness, their heatster smarts, their dark alien power, but a lot of it isn't really a surprise anymore. A great deal of fire's flowed under the bridge since those days: as every rockabilly revival proves, the lineaments of heat aren't so hard to copy. For every song in this collection we've all heard so often that shock is impossible ("Blue Suede Shoes"), there are songs, and moments in songs, which truly astonish. Obviously there's the original cataclysm: the protean quality of the very first A-side, "That's Alright (Mama)" is like a kind of Bug Bang Theory for modern pop, where a causeless something flicks out of nowhere into somewhere, and expands at unthinkable speed to unthinkable proportions.

But the shocks that follow are often as not tiny, subtle, blink-and-miss-it stuff, qualities of restraint, hiccups and slurs the equivalent of the sideways glance, of alert self-mockery. They build up into a picture of someone genuinely unlike the image we mostly come across today, a picture of someone incredibly on the ball, of someone profoundly aware of where he is and what he's doing, seizing on the lucky break he's been given and making the most of it. For his own pleasure – recording his disgracefully bawdy "One Night Of Sin" ("The things I did and I sure would make the Earth stand still") absolutely straight-faced, the same day, Jan 24 1957, as "Let Me Be Your) Teddy Bear" (near-generic underage goodtime energy; his throb already more habit than not).

If there's a "decline" audible here, it comes

as much through the boredom of total, unbelievable success as anything – a realisation that landing the work and working the audiences after a while needs only the broadest sweep, not the detailed wit, that the fun he's having, bar to bar, breath to breath, ain't part of what he's loved for. Country rock'n'roll, his original vehicle, is exhausting itself – it's not big enough for him. The cynical teenradio-plays ("Jailhouse Rock", famously) that Leibler and Stoller cook up for him save off ennuis for a while; but if they're fun, there's a kind of cheapness to them also, when this fails him, it's increasingly back to the ballads he started off with, so any momentary novelty that falls to hand. The energy will stay – so that after a while, it's a shock that he has it to draw on – for ages after the world stops asking for it of him, and after he stops himself.

A grey, featureless, conformist austerity, simultaneously frightened and complacent, is blown apart suddenly, forever, by youth, sex, violence, an atavistic and twisted Southern heat, a crudely explosive jungle beast-rock'n'roll, said Sinatra, speaking for many, is the "martial music of every sideburned delinquent on the face of the earth." I don't really believe this picture any more – Elvis wasn't apart from his times, or untypical. He was his times, in all their contradictory splendour, absolutely concentrated. This collection is a great way to experience those contradictions, that concentration.

## club picks

Kodwo Eshun hangs around  
in late night bars

**THE GRID/TODD TERRY** *FIGURE OF EIGHT 12" (Virgin VSTDJ141)* The Grid have been waiting for someone to annihilate them – so that the bones of their assemblage might rise again. Todd Terry terminates the Grid. He annuls them, hammers their music into smooth, flat vertical metal, a surface so fleshless it turns meaning-free. Sculpt and grace, mathematics as it is imagined to be, perching off at its top end into freefloating phonemes – scraps, slithers of decapitated vowels. The delicious glee of the chorus: "Iollereaaaulooohheeeconlowaa" (takes longer to write it than to hear it) is the sound of vowel unchained, set free from syntax. All the mixes are machine rhythm as drum and

bass, beats pulverised, driven, frozen into astatic mobility. Todd Terry was one of the first to realise pseudonymity as the death of the producer and the freedom of the producer as auteur. So much anonymity so many brands: Todd Terry's should be copyrighted.

**HOUSE OF PAIN** JUMP AROUND/HOUSE OF PAIN ANTHEM 12" (*Tammy Boy TB526A*) If Beastie Boys are the last Party in rap, insisting on their right-to-goof, their whiteness a reaction against white defensiveness, then House of Pain, three Irish Americans, take this permission to its limit. "Jump Around", their debut 12", is sheer propulsion, a haush, mucous, strangely stilted headrush of crude defiance: "I never eat a pig coz a pig is a cop/Ov better yet a Terminator like Arnold Schwarzenegger". Sharing the same demented joy as Kris Kross' "Jump" and Chubb Rock's "Treat 'em Right", H.o.P.'s production bears the catastrophic mark of DJ Muggs of Cypress Hill (who also just produced Beastie Boys new single). Cypress Hill opened the way for post-Gonzo rap with their crowded debut classic last year. In their wake, post-gangster pleasures like this. Nothing to do but Jump up! Jump up! Jump up! And Get down!

**ORIGINAL ROCKERS** PUSH PUSH EP (*The Cage Label promo*) The terms upon which certain kinds of dub and certain kinds of House meet are precarious. Too much House unnecessarily tries to legitimate itself with reference to dub – which turns out to mean only the weakest sorts of echo and dub effects. No one has yet been using the studio itself to its full effect as an instrument, nor fully recognised that House now has its own history of dub which is sometimes (productively) confused with the original form. In the face of the massive youth success of ragga-techno, dub is being positioned as a mature music, enlisted as a new ambient-hyphenate, as a door to transcendence. All the same, Original Rockers, from Birmingham, haven't done it all bodily: "Push Push" has a bass-synth-driven energy which carries it right up to the beautiful chorus sample from Scientist, at which point it pauses, waits on the pulse, then moves off again.

**SMARTER'S** SESAME'S TREET (*Suburban Base Promo*) This is the kind of record Original Rockers loathe. In fact it's the kind of record everyone loathes. With its clumsy puns on E, its ludicrous speed changes, its chorus from

*Sesame Street*, it's a record like The Prodigy's "Cherry", a track which conjures a generation gap from nowhere. Very nearly the end of music as we know it, it taps into the laddy cartoon unconscious of the mid-70s. Those who love it are too young to "remember" its chorus. Those who hate it remember the whole programme only too well. If indeed you are what you sample, then *every clobber's fear* is embodied – and amplified – by this record. I think it's a trip. And on TV, it's even better, an autistic non-spectacle, the Autopsy Exhibition finally destroying 25 years of Top of the Pops without even trying. Punk couldn't do that. Playground Techno, Toytown Techno like this is the music of the blank generation for real, for ever.

**SHUT UP AND DANCE** THE ART OF MOVING BUTTS REMIX (*SUAD promo*) If SUAD were American, they would be hailed as the next Mantronix. They promote a confusion seemingly beyond their understanding, regularly and uncaringly crossing genres that their followers spend much energy keeping apart. To track SUAD is to find yourself in new areas without excuses, with no justifications. "Raving, I'm Raving" was pure cheek. This is their most commercial, exhilarating track, a pause in the supposed controversy. It opens immediately into the chorus before swerving into lite breakbeat and a stolen note from A Tribe Called Quest. It's over before you know it.

**VARIOUS ARTISTS** GIVE PEACE A DANCE, VOL. 2: THE AMBIENT COLLECTION LP (*Disarms 4 LP*) CND Communications have produced a series of excellent compilations. Volume 2 ventures into the sublime, navigating its own mysterious routes. Bleep and Booster's technology remix of "Genki" (a Japanese fruit drink) is an uncanny weave of timber, mystery and ascension, beyond the merely ambient. Suns of Arqa's "Kakavati Alap", a duet for bamboo flute and santoor, is a track whose untimely stateliness has arrived in the year Ethnodelia has at last gone overground. Actually, it leaves Ethnodelia behind (as the moon leaves satellites behind) to lock into its own orbit. "Solaris" (by Solaris) is a cathedral inside a space station, the sound of Thomas Köner crossed with chamber music.

**d.c. BASEHEAD** PLAY WITH TOYS (*IMAGO 7 2787 21012 LP*) As if Michael Ivey (23, Howard Grad.) has reached into the unconscious interstices of rap, its dream passages,

its languor, its digressions – and zoomed in to form an entire Image Sound event. How can I count the kinds of narcolepsy Ivey sets forth? Guitars approach the force of the near-acoustic. The voice is from the side of the mouth, the gaze averts its eyes. Dangerous emotions, white boy territory, are being walked through here. Disappointment, inertia, torpor, diffidence, nervousness, laziness: Scott Poulson-Bryant once fantasised (in *Spin* magazine) about the Other Emotions, the ones Hip-Hop didn't allow itself, the ones he had to cross over to alternative rock to find. After all Hip-Hop's Sleep-No-More calls (Brand Nubian, Organised Konfusion), the language of awakening into consciousness (which has powered the best rap of the last three years) is suddenly quietly ignored. Such a music of amplified intimacy, revealed at the edges of earshot, loses some-



thing as well: no visas, no open chaos, no crowding of sense. On "Evening News", Ivey's approach lets him into the dissonance and division within his generation, the arguments about who has the authority to articulate all the collective differences in African American (and by implication all American) youth. A homie and an Afrocentric brother bicker about what to watch on TV, the former grabs the remote and switches channels until d.c. Basehead suddenly start playing. The music then dwindles away as if someone pulled the plug on it.

Homie: Hey man, you can't end no song like that. What's the solution, man, what's the solution?

Ivey: The solution is . . . it's a complex situation (pause), but the solution is . . . (pathetically) I don't know . . . keep playing . . .

Music comes in again, argument rises,

chorus starts arguing against the brothers, telling them to stop. Then a gun is pulled and the home kills the Afrocentric brother. Hilarious tragedy: latest casualty in the Consciousness War.

## fast licks

**K. Martin stomps around the Outer Limits of sound.**

**STEVEN JESSE BERNSTEIN PRISON** (*Sub Pop SPCD 371195*) Self-confessed chemical, crime refugee consumed by suppressed loathing, earlier this year Bernstein chose suicide above genocide, a fact which accentuates the poignancy of this voyeuristic, hellish peep-show. This human dissident's brute poetry readings were posthumously set to music by Sub Pop's in-house producer. Themes of humiliation and degradation are set to cheeky chatshow themes, 60s pop floss or sleazeball funk; the music heightening a sense of unease. His nihilism, offset by humour as black as tar, offers cold comfort for nervous laughter. A startlingly significant epitaph.

**CASPAR BRÖTZMANN MASSAKER THE TRIBE** (*Zeusor ZS CM08*) This year's resurrection of the guitar has been more fake stance than substance. Caspar's exhilarating outbursts on this long-delayed CD reissue illuminate this lack of conviction elsewhere: a guitar truly stretched. Many artists yield to external pressure with consecutive releases, but Massaker have grown darker. This, their debut, recorded in 1987 at FMP Studios, is a black-hearted beast, reveling in its own austerity. The wah-wah drenched songs are Hendrix shorn of the flowery accessories. Too corrosive for metal, too good to ignore second time round.

**PGR THE CHEMICAL BRIDE** (*Silent Records SR 9218*) Kim Cascone's nightmare odyssey continues. Trading now as PGR, he's presently soundtracking artificial existence. Marking the death of heavy industry, his techno-specters amplify the electrical hum which surrounds the city night and day. Synthesised drones and amorphous percussion soothe the ear, instilling a cool numbness. More mechanical than Thomas Koener's aural hallucinations, PGR mirror the

rhythms of breathing apparatus. The listener becomes synchronised to the eerily addictive stray signals. A sinister takeover by a fine sound sorcerer.

**PAUL DOLDEN THE THRESHOLD OF DREAFTING SILENCE** (*Troiaudio TRD-0190 CD*) Scientific composer or musical mathematician? Either way Dolden believes in strength through numbers. He begins with 400 computer generated tracks of sound on the aptly titled "Below The Walls Of Jericho", and ends by digitally condensing 330 notes per second for the final title. A sea of brass, woodwind, string and percussion attempts to bring the house down. All sources, tunings and structures are liquified. All mental defences crumble as the crescendo lay siege to the mind. A clattering, rattling, scraped delirium engineered by a noise addict who evidently relishes the point of impact.

**SCORN VAE SOLIS** (*Earsache MOSH 54 CD*) **LICK FOREVER DOG EP** (*Earsache MOSH 61 CD*) The original Napalm Death line up re-united, Scorn have chosen long-haul stops over their earlier fast thrills policy. They've replaced high speed reiteration with slow motion oppression. Textural sampling and spaced out production techniques give their bass domination an added new age ambience. Leaving one foot in the Godflesh/Helmut school of pulverisation, *Vae Solis* delivers, but promises still more. The EP pays in full. Exploring the alchemic possibilities of the remix, they construct a dubbed-out metal zone. A diet of bad drugs, deviant splatter and unspoken poem may explain this aural headfuck.

**FIRE ENGINES FOND** (*Creation CREV LP001*) Ironic pop polemicists tend to laugh at their own jokes once too often, but The Fire Engines had the tunes to suit the diagnosis. Six-string situationists who played first and disbandd young, this CD releases plots their woful short history up to the moment they were left behind by the blank-cheque Scottish pop boom in the early 80s. Their chiming, chastising, detuned guitar sound propped up the poached (or scrambled) advertising slogans of the titles: "New Thing In Carsons", "Lubricate Your Living Room" etc. A consumerist Magic Band for a disposable generation: instant high energy and with 18 tracks, great value for money.

**IN THE NURSERY DUALITY** (*Third Mind TM 9163 2 CD*) A beautiful folly, as fake and superficial as a Greenaway film, its conjunction of pop and classical music cries out for a "stylish French thriller" to counterpoint. Its synth orchestra driven by state of the art drum machinery. ITN champion the notion of skin-deep beauty. A breathy chanteuse and the voice of Richard Barton are the icing on the cake. As entertaining as it's shallow, *Duality* is worth the price of admission, if only for the resurrection of the Welsh bard.

**NEUROSIS SOULS AT ZERO** (*Alternative Tentacles VIRUS 109 CD*) San Francisco throws up another metal mutation. Too self-conscious to be genuinely frightening - unlike their close relations Oxbow or Melvins, Neurosis are fast but don't thrash. Sadly, the underlying tension maintained by their sample-fuelled grunge eclecticism is destabilised by Death Metal's 3D lyrical obsessions: disease, death, decomposition. TV children relishing CNN's upcoming apocalypse coverage. Death Metal has emerged as Goth's spiteful younger brother. Neurosis' black sound mass hovers uneasily above both camps. Best heard loud (without the lyric sheet).

**SHEER ABSOLUTELY SHEER** (*Creation CRE CD 121*) As World Music usurps the disco beat and Western Club dilettantes plunder ethnic sources, One World conformity is threatening to smother. This Brighton duo's hedonistic dubscape is rescued from the land of the bland by the venerable voice of Sister Bex and an elephantine bass sound. Her wide-eyed tones corse belief. Even if their ethnocentric sampling and tapping of reggae's sensuality don't quite match the eroticism of her voice, Sheer still put the rave back in cave.

**DIVINE STYLER SPIRAL WALLS CONTAINING AUTUMNS OF LIGHT** (*Giant Q 24444-2 import*) The latest in the line of the black space chasers. Sun Ra, Funkadelic and Public Enemy all sought their celestial havens. Divine Styler is a disenfranchised rapper/guitarist charging against the constraints of order. On a headtrip to God-knows-where, his streams of consciousness are as crazed as the psychedelic rock draft provided by his backing band. Rock drifts, industrial funkiness and hip-hop balladry are minced and blended. A hallucinogenic tonic even for those who've heard it all before.

torrents. It hardly matters that this refusenik energy/attitude can't last, that it gives the lie to itself within months; for enough observers, sending tremors round the world (that still travel: first West, later East, transfiguring each), all official opinion factories are also discredited. A rent is torn in normality – by Dylan's quotability, by Grace Slick's hallucinatory dysfunction, by a thousand other scribbled messages. It will end up being once more plugged, as iconoclastic semi-literate practice becomes smugly automatic, by the bloated, inert body this new movement soon expands into. And those 60s figures who grew out of urgent noisy idiocy – the singer-songwriters mentioned above? – grew at the same moment out of their deep scepticism. If politics survived in songwriting, it was recorded back into the personal.

Costello, like any alert, ambitious punk-era figure, was in the mid-70s all for blasting the body out of the breach: unlike his extremist contemporaries, he believed there was a plausible way through to the future that could fuse whatever there had been of radical social doubt in this buried collective moment, with all the craft and literate artistry of the more personal tradition that preceded it.

AFTER ALL, the song cannot again be what it was: and nor can the singer. Its constituents had once been counted internally – melodies, rhyme-schemes, horn-charts, the performer's swoops and trills and breathing. In the great inside-outing that occurred between 1956 and 1969 many utterly new things appeared *within* it; apparently external notions, ideas of group activity, electricity, studio editing. This outside world came to be factored into a song's innermost meaning, its singer's least articulated, most forceful expression.

In particular, there was the rise of the Art of the Single itself, the basis of Costello's craft. As the single replaced the song, it allowed all levels of creative activity to manifest in one person – the singer can set up the vehicle for his/her own interpretation, his/her voice. On top of this, the single – unlike the LP track – is almost always first heard in the context of the Chart, that unscheduled marketplace meeting-point of all styles and qualities, where no artist can predict who his/her immediate neighbours will be. Costello put the limits of genre and format into precisely the dizzying, dancing play that the Rodgers/Hart songwriting tradition could only achieve with melody, harmony, wittily prosody, meter-play. In a way, in his prolific flexibility, with the shifts of persona and attack, *he became his own chart*, rich in unpredictable variety, and thus a challenge to the whole of the rest of pop.

So that to return even to so great – so powerful, so expressive – a tradition as Sinatra's (to allow a further recoding of the political back into the personal) would mean giving up far more than you gain: even writing and performing your *own* songs is a lesser benefit, if you're deliberately passing up the opportunity to dialogue with all the rest of music. Refinement of the muse is all very well – although of course many musicians are the better for not trying to encompass too much

(when the supperclubbers tried to hop on board the 60s pop bandwagon, the results were not attractive).

The problem is the sense that refinement in this sense is an aesthetic advance rather than a strategic retreat: many are the versions of the songwriter-as-craftsman in modern pop – from Nick Cave to k.d. lang, there are significant figures working in areas that aren't simply Heritage Industry resale (there's plenty of this as well). None of them will ever be our Sinatra – self-exiles in their corners of the market, they can't rise to any kind of world-spanning timelessness without throwing off precisely the deliberate parochialism that gives them focus and force.

COSTELLO'S OWN failure, however, isn't one of minor retreat, of mere strategic regrouping. It's one of wanting too much. He refuses to accept the imposition of market-ghetto, of appropriate product-behaviour: but the death of the 7" and the consequent change in the make-up and operation of the charts – their gradual multiplication, into dance charts, indie charts, nostalgia charts – have left him without a terrain to manoeuvre on. Music as a whole only exists as a solidified spectacle: all allowable motion comes within pre-set genre: the boundaries he used to skip over and realign with every release have become impermeable (while his facility for such motion renders itself somehow, well, facile).

Actually, if *Mighty Like A Rose* is anything to go by, he's set himself a new, even vaster task – the LP resembles the old parade of parody, pastiche, juxtaposition: it reaches out many ways to touch and put side by side bygone styles, but he's no longer intent on giving them new, vivid life; rather souring them, curdling or poisoning their original innocent spirit. Beginning with the ugly, angry, easy-target Beach Boys remake ("The Other Side Of Summer"), the LP waves its slick Pop-literacy like a garrote for all trivial pleasure, for all historical dabbling. He doesn't seem to care how unattractively explicit he is, about rendering a genre no longer listenable. The form failed him (not "the song" itself, but the "song-as-single"): for the moment he's proving this by a kind of test-to-destruction experiment in discovery – which parts of pop-rock can bear up under full expressive strain?

Every time Billie is asked to sing "Strange Fruit", to make its content palpable, to force us to respond, a modern listener wrestles with demons not really apparent in the rest of the endless Billie (re)package tour – it is not an easy song to hear. It's an anomaly, surviving through its uniqueness, influence nil – the rule-proving exception within jazz-singing, that this most grown-up of forms could only stand so much reality.

Costello seems to want to call up just such a song in every reach of post-war popular music – as if to say, none of it will stand: and we'll have to start again. A late convert to the scorched-earth nihilism he once resisted, he pursues his task with a savage Old Testament sourness that fans and detractors alike fail to appreciate much: to bathe in Pop when the world is the way it is – worse than it was in the mid-70s – is utter treachery. He listens, he says, to classical music. ■

# Rare AND Fine

\*1 **Steve Lacy**, *Eric Dolphy*, *Harold Land*, *Ron Blake*, *John Stuenkel*, *Max Roach*.

12 **Alto Jazz**, *Laure Anderson*, *Chris McGregor*, *Phil Minton* & *Roger Turner*.

18 **Sonny Rollins**, *Tony Chase*, *Jayce Cortez*, *Bobby McFerrin*, *Stanley Jordan*, *Bertrand Tavernier*, *Joe Farrell*.

19 **Ornette Coleman**, *Charlie Haden*, *Steve Lacy*, *Slim Gaillard*, *Jazz Cartoons*.

20 **Art Blakey**, *Hank Mobley*, *Gambel Trio*, *Bobby Watson*, *Wynton & Branford Marsalis*.

21 **Chet Baker**, *Pinke Zoo*, *Janusland*, *Taraxa*, *Ghacho Valdes* & *Arturo Sandoval*, *Phil Wachsmann*, *Michael Nyman*, *Nicola Erigay*.

22 **John Coltrane**, *Janet Blum*, *Ulmer*, *The Gato Lero*, *Ruben Blades*, *Nathan Davis*.

23 **Bill Laswell**, *Loose Tubes*, *Celia Cruz*, *Arto O'Day*, *Alan Bach*, *Arto Lindsay*.

24 **Betty Carter**, *Jimmy Smith*, *Paul Bley*, *John Abernethy*, *Sidney Bechet*, *Maggie Nicoli*, *Vicenna Art Orchestra*.

\*25 **Courtney Pine**, *Paul Motian*, *George Coleman*, *Luciano Berio*, *Gerry Mulligan*.

\*30 **Chico Freeman**, *Alex von Schlippenbach*, *Eddie Harris*.

32 **Django Bates**, *Dwight Redman*, *Tony Oxley*, *Diamanda Galas*, *Weather Report*.

33 **Sonny Rollins**, *Dave Brubeck*, *John Bean*, *John Russell*.

34/35 **Leslie Bowie**, *Branford Marsalis*, *Dexter Gordon*, *Serge Chaloff*, *Loose Tubes*, *Paul Lytton* & *Paul Lewis*, *Frank Zappa*.

36 **Steve Williamson**, *Philip Boer*, *Phil Prall*, *Art Farmer*, *Tashkent Kenda*.

37 **Bobby McFerrin**, *Hampton Hawes*, *Dirty Dozen Brass Band*, *John Laro*.

38 **Wynton Marsalis**, *Wayne Shorter*, *Nigel Kennedy*.

39 **Andy Sheppard**, *Gil Evans*, *Sheila Jordan*, *Todd Dameron*.

40 **Ornette Coleman**, *Charlie Haden*, *Charlie Rouse*, *Robert Ashby*.

41 **Thelonious Monk**, *Steve Coleman*, *Steve Swallow*, *Kronos*, *Tony Smith*.

42 **Morace Silver**, *Bad Shank*, *Kris Stingsby*, *Barney Wilson*.

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The following are still available (\* indicates very few copies remain):

43 **Pat Metheny**, *Robert Johnson*, *Albert Collins*, *Charlie Mariano*, *Ichty Fingers*.

46/47 **Courtney Pine**, *Cecil Taylor*, *Roland Kirk*, *Mike & Kate Washbrook*, *Box Bedrick*, *Babe Goncalves*.

48 **Joe Henderson**, *King Oliver*, *Warne Marsh*, *Herman Leonard*, *Harold Budd*, *Dave Liebman*.

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\*50 **David Holland**, *Tony Smith*, *50 Players*, *Italian Jazz*.

51 **Marilyn Crispell**, *Andy Kirk*, *Richard Poyser*, *Gil Evans*, *Darius Richmond*, *Casper Brütten*.

52 **Sonny Rollins**, *Ed Blackwell*, *Hank Roberts*, *Martin Archer*, *Ornette Coleman*.

53 **John Scofield**, *Chet Baker*, *John McLaughlin*, *Johnny Haden*, *Von Freeman*, *Elliot Sharp*.

54 **Jason Rebello**, *Jimmy Keville*, *Bob Stewart*, *Defunkt*, *Adelaide Hall*.

55 **David Sanborn**, *Booker Little*, *John Laro*, *Lennox Newkirk*, *Loa Garo*.

56 **Composers**, *Carla Bley*, *John Cage*, *Misha Mengelberg*, *Judith Weir*, *Mike Gibbs*.

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77 **McCoy Tyner**, *Mary Lou Williams*, *Kenny Barron*, *Micromen*, *Chris McGregor*, *Carol Kidd*.

78 **Sun Ra**, *Frank Sinatra*, *Jon Hassell*, *Eugene Chadbourne*, *Vinny Golia*, *Dada Pokuwane*.

79 **Jimi Hendrix**, *Dan Cherry*, *Ray Anderson*, *Pie We Russell*, *Fred Walley*.

80 **Bebop**, *Miles On Record - 1*, *Leon Schacht*, *Scott Hamilton*, *Eto*.

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86 **John Coltrane**, *Joey Mitchell*, *Herb Alpert*, *Chicago*, *Marilyn Crispell*, *Dick Heckstall-Smith*.

88 **Michael Jackson**, *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*, *Elvis Costello*, *Abdullah Ibrahim*, *David Byrne*, *John Coltrane*.

89 **John Lee Hooker**, *Kraftwerk*, *Michael Brecker*, *Igor Stravinsky*, *Greg Oby*, *Natalia Cole*.

90 **Prince**, *Frank Zappa*, *David Sanborn*, *Elliot Carter*, *Barbara Dennerlein*.

91 **Philip Glass**, *Frank Zappa*, *Whitney Houston*, *Clifford Jordan*, *Julius Joseph*, *Sergiy Prokhorov*.

92 **Van Morrison**, *Tin Machine*, *Dave Barrall*, *Groff Kesser*, *Joseph Haydn*, *Loose Tubes*.

93 **Punk celebration**, *Jon Wobbs*, *Eric Dolphy*, *Pandjazy*, *Buddy Guy*, *The Grubbs*, *Wynton*.

94/95 **Great Black Music**, *Wynton Marsalis*, *Liam Armstrong*, *Motown*, *In C* & *Pavle Enery*, *Malgrave Miller*, *Arthur Blum*, *Taj Mahal*.

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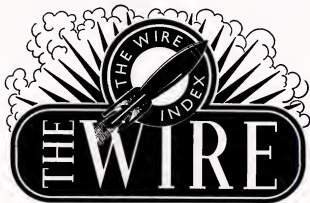
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# C L A S S I F I E D

## Jukebox continued from 57

to him than I gave to Kar Kar, Oumou and John Lee is because Hendrix has had a greater influence on generations of musicians. He's a black American who's never been to Africa, but he's a phenomenon. He speaks with the guitar; he makes it do exactly what he wants.

### ROBERT JOHNSON

"Kindhearted Woman Blues" from *Robert Johnson: The Complete Recordings* (CBS).

I don't know him, but he sounds as if he's the same generation as John Lee Hooker. (No, he's a little earlier, this was recorded in 1937) This is not, and will never be, American music. It is African, truly African. When black Africans were taken to America they had an African spirit, and a spirit of African music, but then they became immersed in another language. Then, when they were liberated from slavery they had to find a way to earn a living and a lot of them did that

basking. This maintained their connection with Africa because that lifestyle of playing on the streets or in bars to earn a living is similar to what people do in Mali. I like this because it's rare to find a black American who sounds like he knows his roots and where he has come from. I'll give it fifteen. I don't know Robert Johnson, but John Lee Hooker is more popular so he gets more marks.

### SALIF KEITA

"Kuma" from *Amen* (Mango)

Hearing this make me want to go back home. Do you want to know how many marks I'm going to give this? Forty. Salif is our Jimi Hendrix. He's the idol of Mali. He is a nobleman. God has given him his voice and his music and there is no one to compare with him. We both started playing music at roughly the same time – and I was an engineer on some of Salif's first records – but Salif always played in the clubs whereas I would play in the studio with the National Radio Orchestra of Mali.

*How do you feel about Salif's more recent albums?*

I don't like them. Now he is producing music that is primarily influenced by European and American music, not African. I'll give Salif 40 marks for the first records he made, but, to me, Salif's music today has no significance. He has lost his way. You have to keep to the path and not deviate; you have to know the direction you're going in. It's important that we don't play European music because otherwise we will lose the original, the roots will be lost forever. And there are always problems when African artists collaborate with Americans or Europeans. On my last album I recorded with Taj Mahal and there were many difficulties because Taj couldn't really keep up or understand what I was doing. I have the way I play; I have my own tuning. I like playing with black American musicians, but they don't always understand the tradition, they haven't learnt what I know. To me, Salif doesn't play African music any longer. And I've told all this to his face. (And how did Salif respond?) Salif certainly told me what he thought, but that is between him and me.

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## YOU CAN RUN BUT YOU CAN'T HIDE

I FEEL I have a moral duty to support D.I. Cameron's criticisms (issue 102), having myself become increasingly exasperated by the self-regarding tosh currently masquerading as writing in your mag. The last, incomprehensible paragraph of Hopy Glass's 'article', "Some Ideas Of East", was the final straw. It reminded me very much of the NME c.1979 - a style of writing and a moment in history I'm not interested in revisiting. (I had a similar kind of experience when I attempted to read your punk retrospective a few months ago, though at least that little bit of rhetorical myth-making raised a few laughs. Ditto Mark Sinker's sententious Sevic Wonder piece and "editorial" in issue 102.)

So, thanks for *Wire* 1-87, but I shall stick to *Jazz Journal* in future - where at least there's an attempt to put music first.

TONY ADAM, Hebden Bridge

P.S. Could you give me a rundown of Richard Johnson's jazz credentials? "Credentialed"? Just think what might ensue if - absolutely thought! - he turned out NOT TO HAVE ANY! At a party! - Ed.

## FOREIGN COUNTRY, INNIT?

100 PLUS and still running so I skipped through some of my COMPLETE collection. Maybe you should do the same, and you may agree with me that the past still has a future. Once upon a time *The Wire* reviewed concerts which both interested and informed - admittedly, and for reasons I could never fathom, the date of the event was never given. Dear departed Richard never did reply to my pleadings on that, or on the dropping of playlists and personnel from the album reviews. Such information is invaluable in deciding where to place a limited budget and should be reintroduced at the expense of more album space.

Of course you could make space by getting rid of the silly "Charts". "They're listing" isn't a terrible joke (issue 102), it's *The Chart* which is the joke. Equally the space-filling guessing game Invisible Jukebox should be consigned to the dustbin of antiquities - it was an idea used by another organ over 30 years ago when it was at least fresh. Oh yes, and "I can definitely say that Charlie Parker stopped and did not continue to go forward"

## THE WRITE PLACE

Send us your words of wisdom

to our new address:

Namara House, 45-47 Poland Street,  
London W1V 3DF

in May 1990. Why the hell not?

Never mind! I am addicted and won't resist renewing my "fix" - there have been and will be far too many high points in the story of *The Wire*.

BOB LAMB, South Wirral.

## DISTANT DRUMS

COULD YOU help me to find the names of and any information on these drummers, colleagues whose inimitable art I simply adore! Who plays the drums on:

+ Ray Charles *Invites You To Listen* - late 60s? Solid and discreet bigband drumming, arranger Sid Feller?

+ Dionne Warwick(e) singing Bacharach/David material ie "Always Something There To Remind Me" and "Promises, Promises" etc. - throughout the 60s; one brush, one stick, tympani, complete control in odd meters, masterworks?

+ Dionne Warwick(e) with Holland-Dozier-Holland: "Just Being Myself" - 1973, very original drumsound (probably the guy who always worked with these producers?)

+ "Forever Came Today": The Supremes sing a 1968 Holland-Dozier-Holland track for Motown - supreme stuff indeed! The shifters between the emphasis of the beat and the timing of the singing . . . . .!!!

Some specialist should know - please get in contact via Po Torch Records, P.O. Box 1005, D-5100 Aachen 1, F.R. of Germany. A million thanks.

PAUL LOVENS, Aachen.

P.S. For years I thought it was Hal Blaine (Phil Spector, Elvis' "Devil In Disguise") until I read his book.

## 99% OF EVERYTHING

I WROTE yet two times saying my disappointment seeing the turn of what I used to consider as "the very best magazine in the world", I mean for music. It has always been obvious for me that music has no frontiers, that music is everywhere, from the plects of Olivier Messiaen to the rage of hardcore, through Ornette Coleman and Art Tatum. You could have involved into this great landscape more traditional music, the sounds of the natives all over the world, which sometimes provide us more "astonishment" and happiness than "bourgeois" pseudo-music called classicism. I mean one who listened to sufï music from Iran for example, cannot listen anymore any kind of music with the same ease; his spirit changed too deeply in terms of perception.

But what really disappointed me, is to see that people like you couldn't have courage enough not to justify yourself of the entering of "shit" (I mean it, and you know that everybody mean it!) like M. Jackson or W. Houston in such a magazine. In the 100th issue you used words to say it has to go on this way, and it reminds me the very dark part of French history, when people said the same to collaborate with nazis. Just because nowadays nazis is this "everywhere area of marketing", and everybody knows it.

I only want to say that silence, in this case, is collaboration. And what music deserves, right now, for respect to Mingus, Parker, Coltrane . . . . , is a new revolution!

Don't forget that pride is to say the truth, not to wear a beautiful "Wire" t-shirt in page 11 of the 100th issue. So long.

PHILIPPE CALICHON, PARIS.

Is it just me, or is someone who says that not apologising for carrying a future on Michael Jackson is the moral equivalent of collaborating with the nazis perhaps a little in danger of losing perspective? If "everybody" "knows" that the do-it-yourself album *By Your Side* is shit, however *Thriller* is the best-selling record of all time? If "everybody" only includes those never "taken in" by marketing, there aren't that many of us left - Ed.

## LAST BUT NOT LEAST . . .

I DON'T know who gets to read this [*Everyone! It's in The Write Place!* - Ed.] but the new direction taken by *The Wire* over the past few months has been very welcome (especially with the brain-death of the weekly music press). Never underestimate your readership's intelligence! More extremity, please.

PETE GREEN, Hartlepool.

dave brubeck  
the essential

with Take Five, Blue  
Rondo A La Turk  
Pastiche



duke ellington  
the essential

with Take the 'A' Train,  
I Got It Bad And  
That Ain't Good



sarah vaughan  
the essential

with SummerTime,  
Black Coffee, Ain't  
Nothin' But the Blues



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